

FIGHTING POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ROLES
OF THE CHURCHES AND THE STATE

by

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PREFACE

This project is another stage along the way of a long-standing interest in public and private social welfare programs in the United States. While it is hoped that its focus on poverty in the United States will be helpful and informative for church leaders making plans for the future, it is further hoped that the existence of poverty in the United States will increasingly come to be seen for what it is: one more example and expression of oppression and injustice which are common around the world. As Julio de Santa Ana has so aptly put it:

The primary intention of the struggle against destitution and misery is to eradicate hunger, illiteracy, needless illness, inadequate housing and to satisfy other basic human needs. However, the ultimate goal of the struggle against poverty is the elimination of all forms of oppression: racial, social, economic, political, cultural, sexist, and so on. Though this may sound Utopian, it is, nevertheless, the goal of those¹ who strive for a more just, participatory and sustainable society.

Thanks are, of course, due to many, but especially to Alice Holmes, who has typed the manuscript under difficult circumstances; and to my wife, Bobbie, and daughter Lyndsay Jo, for their patience and support during the writing of this project.

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¹Julio de Santa Ana, Towards a Church of the Poor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981) 84.

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ABSTRACT

The alleviation of poverty and the deteriorating plight of the poor in the United States are concerns for both the Church and the civil government. This project deals with the problem of determining appropriate future roles for the churches and the state in social welfare in the United States of America.

The paper begins by examining the nature and extent of poverty in the United States. Second, the project assesses the relevance of the problem through the biblical witness regarding the theological significance of the poor for the Church. Third, the development of the roles of the Church and the state in social welfare is traced, referring briefly to the period between the early church and the founding of the American colonies, and concentrating on the developments which directly influenced welfare in the United States. Fourth, guidelines for the future are established by an examination of the legal issues arising from the unique understanding of church-state relations in the United States, the theological/ethical issues posed by the welfare problem, and the practical issues facing the Church and the state. Finally, the paper concludes by suggesting that the principal responsibility for the public welfare belongs to the federal government. The Church must not spend its energies duplicating programs done better by the federal government, but should pioneer and experiment in the welfare field. Most significantly, the Church must renew and find new expressions for its solidarity with the poor as an expression of the search for a just, participatory, and sustainable global society.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The increase of poverty in the United States in recent years has once again posed for the churches the problem of determining appropriate roles in the present and the future for themselves and the state in social welfare programs. This project deals with that problem.

The poverty picture in the United States surely has changed in the last two decades and, despite the critics, government programs have been important in bringing the change about. From 1960, when 22 percent of the population was officially classified as poor, the percentage of needy people dropped steadily to a low of 11.4 percent in 1978. Increasingly, studies are showing that it was the federal public assistance programs which contributed the most to this decline.¹ But the percentage of those living below the poverty line rose to 14 percent by 1981, following closely on the heels of major reductions in welfare programs.² In 1982, the rate rose to 15 percent, representing 34.4 million people and the highest percentage since 1965.³ Predictably, the poverty rate increased most among blacks (35.6 percent of whom were poor) and Hispanics (29.9 percent); the

¹ See, for instance, John E. Schwarz, America's Hidden Success (New York: Norton, 1983) especially pages 25-59.

² "Poverty Trap: No Way Out?" U. S. News & World Report 93 (August 16, 1982) 31.

³ "U. S. Poverty By the Numbers," Newsweek 102 (August 15, 1983) 17.

largest single category of poor families consisted of households headed by women (36.3 percent of the poverty population).⁴ The South remains the region with the highest percentage of poor families (18.1 percent), although regional poverty gaps have been narrowed.⁵ Until recently, approximately 9 percent of the population has been lifted out of poverty by federal aid programs. A study by Sheldon Danziger of the University of Wisconsin indicates that this figure was constant from the mid-1960's to the late 1970's. The recent rounds of budget cuts have caused this figure to drop.⁶ This means that we are talking about a current, staggering human reality in deprivation.

If the cold statistical data are insufficient to convince anyone of the growing severity of poverty in the United States, then perhaps the human examples in every corner of the country will do so. Easiest to point out are the hundreds of church-sponsored programs which provide emergency assistance to the poor. In recent months there has been a dramatic increase in the number of the homeless, hungry, and poverty-stricken who show up on the doorsteps of church agencies, emergency shelters, and parish offices. Mayors from around the country testified to the Senate Rural Development, Oversight, and Investigation subcommittee that requests for emergency food, shelter, and economic assistance have risen as much as 200

⁴Ibid.

⁵Randolph E. Schmid, "Regional Poverty Gaps Being Narrowed," Los Angeles Times (June 16, 1983) I-D-16.

⁶Joel Havermann, "Welfare Cuts Stir Debate Over Impact," Los Angeles Times (December 26, 1983) I-1, 20, 21.

percent.⁷ Food distributions in Seattle's King County reached 1.2 million in the first six months of 1983, more than double the 561,942 food distributions in the same period of 1982 and more than four times the 1981 figure.⁸ A shelter program opened in Pomona, California, sponsored by the local Council of Churches, was deluged with over 250 requests for bed space in its first six weeks of operation in October - November, 1983.

Of course, the "official" poor are only part of the problem. There are, in addition to these, millions of Americans who are just above the poverty level--those who manage to get by as long as they can continue to work. Here the specter of unemployment appears with all of the harsh realities that follow it.

Meanwhile, as the need for assistance grows at an alarming pace, local welfare agencies--public and private, including church-related institutions--have had to reduce services because of federal and state budget cuts to social service programs. Many poor people have been affected. Some 400,000 families have lost their food-stamp benefits because of a rise in the eligibility requirements. The federal share of Medicaid costs has been reduced, with further cuts expected in the future; some states have had to stop benefits for eyeglasses, drugs, and dental checkups. 340,000 public-service jobs have been eliminated, forcing many to seek assistance. Still other cuts have come to Aid to Families with Dependent Children, nutrition

⁷"Food Aid Requests Up 200%, Panel Told," Los Angeles Times (June 14, 1983) I-4.

⁸Louise Cook, "Food Programs Are Expanding," Progress Bulletin [Pomona, CA] (September 4, 1983) 14.

programs for needy women and infants, housing subsidies, energy assistance, legal services, and college grants for disadvantaged students. Legal aid services for the poor have been cut 25 percent from 1981 levels; Donald Bogard, president of the Legal Services Corporation, says the best estimates indicate only 20 to 50 percent of the need is being met.⁹ Denver has eliminated a homemaker's program to help the low-income elderly with housekeeping chores; Louisville health services for the disadvantaged have been cut by almost 40 percent; a St. Louis program to train unemployed women has been terminated.¹⁰

The welfare problem is vast. Poverty and oppression are not hard to find, even in a prosperous country like the United States. Furthermore, the plight of the poor is deteriorating in the current political climate. The Church, particularly the churches in the United States, have an inherent interest in this problem. Concern for and identification with the poor have always been part of the Church's conception of itself. It was in part this self-conception that prompted the churches in the 1930's to press for significant expansion of the federal role in social welfare in America, so that more people could be helped through a centralized federal program than through the varied efforts of financially-strapped states, communities, and churches. But now, the Reagan administration has taken a decisive step away from the concerns of the poor by passage of significant tax and budget cut legislation designed to give more tax relief to

⁹"Deep Discord Hobbles Legal Aid for Poor," U. S. News & World Report 94 (October 31, 1983) 66.

¹⁰"Poverty Trap," 32.

the middle- and upper-income brackets and less governmental aid to the least affluent. The Reagan administration's highly-touted welfare "safety net" is insufficient as an answer to the welfare crisis. The "Proposition 13" drive of the late 1970's is now causing similar cuts in welfare benefits at the state level. President Reagan's assumption is that state, local, and private agencies should be taking up the slack in the welfare load.

For the Administration to insist on leaving provisions for the common welfare to haphazard expressions of voluntary giving on the part of individuals, local congregations, local communities, and special interest groups while a vast, complex, interdependent, affluent society thrives around them seems to be an inherently unsympathetic attitude toward the poor, revealing a serious lack of understanding about the poverty problem. The scale of the work to be done in welfare is so large that it can only be done adequately upon the broad base of an extensive public welfare program. The church must not spend its energies duplicating programs done better by the federal government, but should pioneer and experiment in the welfare field—go beyond the present—be prophetic. But when the federal government abdicates its responsibilities to the general welfare of the people, the church has no choice but to do what it can to provide relief for the poor.

The working assumption of this project is that the principal burden of providing for the general welfare of the American poor should rest upon all the people of the nation through the federal government, and that the churches should take specialized roles in alleviating poverty, working, for example, as advocates for the poor

and pioneers in innovative welfare programs. It is clear that the federal government must bear the major portion of the burden of meeting the expanding needs and demands of the American poor. Private institutions are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their positions as sources of welfare in the face of serious financial pinches in their own programs and rapidly expanding world economic woes. Even though American generosity continues at record levels, the gains have not kept up with the inflation rate for several years. The Reagan administration tax cut plan contains negative incentives for charitable giving. The federal government is backing off in its welfare responsibilities. State and local governments do not have the resources to meet the demand for aid. What should the churches do?

The present welfare crisis combines with the churches' traditional identification with the poor to make this project especially important in the life of the church. The attempt to formulate new directions for the church in social welfare makes the discussion of particular relevance to professional leaders in the church.

In order to respond adequately to the problem posed by this project, the paper will begin by assessing the relevance of the problem to the life of the church by an examination of the theological significance of the poor for the Church. Second, the project will trace the development of the roles of the churches and the state in social welfare in the United States. This development begins with the traditions of concern for the poor begun in antiquity and expounded throughout Western societies, and finally brought to the American colonies by the earliest settlers. The study will refer

both to specific programs and the concepts behind the roles played. The status of current welfare programs will be discussed. After establishing the traditions which are behind social welfare in the United States, the unique legal issues in the welfare field stemming from the unusual relationship between the American churches and the state will be examined to provide some guidelines for future directions. Guidelines for the future will also be derived from a look at theological and ethical issues, and practical issues. Finally, various welfare alternatives for the future will be offered, and concluding recommendations for the future roles of the churches and the state in American social welfare will be made.

Chapter 2

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POOR FOR THE CHURCH

"What's all this garbage about the poor and oppressed?" I had just handed a lay worship leader a copy of the liturgies for the worship service in which she was assisting. "This is America, you know. Why worry?" Her voice faded as a blur of faces raced through my mind. Faces as close as our own town, faces sunken with despair for having no housing or food. Faces in the rural areas surrounding us, faces in the barrios of Los Angeles, faces across the United States. Why worry, indeed?

The problem of the poor is at the very heart of the church's witness. Justice for the poor is one part of the church's witness to the Good News; witness and evangelism are empty without work for justice.

When the gospel is heard today, there is no divorce between evangelism and justice. A great number of the earth's millions today lack the basic daily necessities of life and, very often, it is these same people who are also denied access to the gospel. In some cases they have rejected the gospel because it was offered to them by churches aligned with the rich and powerful oppressors. Others have never had the opportunity of knowing God's promise to them in Jesus Christ. The justice to which the poor of the earth are entitled includes sharing with them the good news of God's liberating purpose through them and in them.¹

What is the nature of this good news to the poor? This chapter attempts to answer that question through an examination of the understanding of the poor and poverty in the documents upon which the Christian faith is founded--the Bible.

¹"Issue Paper I: Witnessing In A Divided World," Issues (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) 7.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Hebrew language has a rich vocabulary for describing the poor and poverty.² Some words ('ebyon, rush, dal: lean, thin, poor) refer simply to lack of basic material needs. Other words, virtually synonymous, imply the dehumanizing impact of poverty ('anah, to be bowed down, lowly, downtrodden; and 'anaw, afflicted, humble).

'Ebyon occurs more than sixty times in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (24 times). It almost always means economic deprivation (Deut. 15:7; 24:14; Ps. 109:16). It is often paralleled with 'ani ("poor and needy": Pss. 109:16; 35:10; 72:12; etc.) and dal (Pss. 72:13; 82:4; 113:7; Prov. 14:31; 31:9). In God's sight, the poor and needy are all those who need deliverance from material want, evil, or sin. God will deliver the poor and needy from trouble (Pss. 9:18-19; 12:5; 69:33; 86:1; Is. 25:4; 29:19; 41:17, etc.).

Dal and dalah are from the root word dalal, "to be low, languish." It is found 48 times in the Hebrew text: 5 times in the historical books, 4 in the codes, 13 in the prophets, 6 in the Psalms, and 20 in the wisdom texts. The word refers specifically to those whose wealth and social status had been reduced. Not only are they thus the opposite of the rich (Ex. 23:3; 30:15; Lev. 14:21; Prov. 22:16, etc.) but they are also impaired in their physical strength and psychological ability until they are helpless (Job 34:28; Ps.

² Much of the material regarding the Old Testament vocabulary for the poor and poverty is found in C. U. Wolfe, "Poor" and "Poverty," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) III, 843-844, 853-854; and L. E. Keck, "Poor," Supplement 672-675.

82:3; Jer. 40:7; 52:16, etc.).

The afflicted and bowed down, 'anaw, are oppressed by the rich (Is. 3:14; Ez. 18:16-18; Amos 2:7; etc.). They may be the pious who have been downtrodden by the wicked (Ps. 10:2; Is. 14:32; etc.); sometimes the words are used for the "humble" (Num. 12:3; Zech. 9:9). Both 'anaw and its correlate verb 'anah, imply active humiliation of one person or group by another. It describes a situation of weakness and social inferiority.

Rush or rish and related words apparently refer to the dispossessed, and thus may be a derivative of yarash, "possess." The concept of hunger is involved, as in the reference to the hungry lions of Ps. 34:10. It also refers to the forceful impoverishment of a person or a group by "dispossessing" them of their goods.

A. George has noted that:

this vocabulary expresses an idea of poverty which is quite different from ours. In our modern languages, as well as in Greek and Latin, poverty is the absence of goods: it is an economic notion. Hebrew sometimes denotes it as a lack ("rash") or a plea ("'ebyon"), but above all it sees it as a situation of dependence ("'ani," "'anaw," "misken") or weakness ("dal"). To the men of the Bible, the poor are not so much needy as inferior, small, oppressed: it is a social notion.

So, when the Bible speaks of the poor and poverty, it refers not only to the condition of economic deprivation, but also to the condition of social deprivation—i.e., the loss of human dignity, basic rights, and social and political power. The "poor" and "poverty-stricken"

³ A. George, "La Pauvrete' dans l'Ancien Testament," La Pauvrete' Evangelique (Paris: Cerf, 1971) 14-18. As quoted in Julio de Santa Ana, Good News to the Poor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) 10.

are those who hold an inferior economic or social status.⁴

Poverty has many causes in the Old Testament. In most cases, poverty is not directly established by God--although I Sam. 2:7 and Job 1:21 are notable exceptions. In the vast majority of cases, poverty is caused by circumstances over which the victim is powerless and has no control: oppression and greed (Ex. 1:13; II Sam. 12:1-2; Jer. 22:13; etc.); calamity, plague, and disease (Ex. 10:4-5; Ps. 105:34; etc.); war, fraud, and usury (Num. 11:4-5; Judg. 10:8; etc.). The Wisdom literature (which in part reflects the wisdom of other peoples) finds the cause of poverty in laziness (Prov. 6:10; 10:4, etc.), drunkenness (Ecclus. 19:1), sumptuous living (Prov. 21:17; Ecclus. 18:32), and folly and stubbornness (Prov. 13:18; 28:19; etc.). It is important to note, however, that the Wisdom traditions reflect observations on human experience which could easily be made today. "Their value lies in the exhortation to work and a serious and earnest approach to life. Clearly, however, they cannot be applied to all types of poverty."⁵

The very earliest traditions of the Old Testament rarely mention the problem of poverty or the poor. Indeed, in the early history of human civilization all people lived in what we would call poverty. The close bonds between individuals and families in the nomadic tribes of the ancient Middle East worked to reduce extremes of poverty unless the entire tribe became destitute. A few, like Abraham, were wealthy (Gen. 12:16). It was only with urbanization following the conquest of Canaan that the inequity between classes became evident for the

⁴George, quoted in Santa Ana, 10. ⁵Ibid., 1.

Israelite people. At the beginning of the conquest most families were landowners, but it was not long before some became landed barons while others were practically serfs. Some who owned land lost it due to calamity (Ex. 10:4-6; Ps. 105:34; Joel 1:4), war (Judg. 10:6-17), or fraud (II Sam. 12:1-15).

The disparity between the rich and the poor developed substantially during the Israelite monarchy. Since the social and economic well-being of every Israelite was assumed to be the norm (Deut. 15:4), poverty was a significant social problem whose reality mocked the norm ("for the poor will never cease out of the land": Deut. 15:11). This disparity between norm and reality elicited laws for the protection of the poor and produced diverse theological understandings of poverty and wealth.

The theological understandings of poverty in the Old Testament vary with the fluctuations in socioeconomic conditions between the conquest and Maccabean times.⁶ First, because prosperity was interpreted as God's blessing and reward for faithfulness (Ps. 112), poverty was viewed as a sign of God's punishment for unfaithfulness (Deut. 28). Prosperity was thus given a moral and religious meaning. The Wisdom writers, as noted above, most often espouse this position. However, at other times they are quite aware of the ambiguity of wealth and poverty (Prov. 28; Eccclus. 18:25-26; 25:2; 29:22), and the dangers of both are seen (Prov. 30:8-9; Eccclus. 14:3-10), as is the tendency of the rich to exploit the poor (Eccclus. 13:3-13). The book of Job makes clear that this correlation between faithfulness and prosperity

⁶The development of the theological concept of poverty is summarized from Keck, 672-673.

was too simple.

Second, despite this traditional understanding of the sources of wealth and poverty, the Old Testament expresses concern for the conditions of the poor. Indeed, such concern had appeared in the Middle East before the writing of the Old Testament ever began; much of the common wisdom of the time became incorporated into it. It appears as early as in the Law of the Covenant, in its defense of the slave (Ex. 21:1-11, 26-27), the widow and the orphan (Ex. 22:20-23) the servant (Ex. 22:25), and the beggar (Ex. 23:6, 11). In the Old Testament, the poor were a special charge of God. God would not forget them (Pss. 9:12, 10:12, etc.). God pities and comforts them (Ps. 34:6; Is. 49:13; etc.) and cares for them (Job 5:15; Pss. 107:41; 132:15; Jer. 20:13; etc.). There are many warnings against the oppression of the poor in the Law of the Covenant which also instructs the Hebrew judges to give the poor full protection (Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15; etc.).

Third, it is in the perspective of the Covenant that the eighth-century prophets take up the cause of the poor. Their sense of justice, based in Yahweh's own righteousness, inspired the prophets to denounce all wealth gained at the expense of the poor (e.g., Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-12; 8:4-6; Is. 3:13-24; Jer. 6:26-29; Mic. 2:1-2). They denounce all forms of economic repression: high taxes and tithes; fraudulent trade; the seizure of land; selling as slaves those who cannot pay their debts; and the implicit violence of the oppressor's injustice (Ez. 16:49; 18:12-13; Zech. 7:10). While the prophets also based their work on the simple reward-punishment scheme, they nevertheless realized (like Job) that there was no direct relationship between

faithfulness and prosperity. Their experiences during the monarchies revealed that wealth produced power, power through which the poor were often robbed of their rights.

Fourth, the Old Testament King and the Messiah were to be solicitous of the poor (Pss. 22:26; 72:4). The belief that Yahweh would destroy the nation of Israel because of its injustice to the poor (as well as for other reasons) led to the subsequent eschatological expectation of a land of equity and prosperity for all, governed by an ideal ruler who would safeguard the rights of the poor (Is. 11:3-5). Jeremiah assumed this righteous ruler to be the boy-king Josiah, and denounced the abuses of Josiah's successor Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:15-16). Isaiah's hope of a faithful remnant which would survive the coming disaster came to be understood by Zephaniah as a remnant of the poor (Zeph. 3:11-13). Deutero-Isaiah, writing during the Exile, called God's people the poor (Is. 49:13), as does Trito-Isaiah (Is. 61:1-2) and Psalm 140:4. In response to the message of the first prophets, the writer of Deuteronomy developed more specifically the laws favoring the poor already outlined in the Law of the Covenant. This is most clearly seen in the laws concerning the tithe of the third year, which was for the benefit of the poor and needy (Deut. 14:29; 26:12-13); the year of release (Deut. 15:11-11); the slave (Deut. 15:12-18); the feasts, from which the poor were not to be excluded (Deut. 16:11, 14); and the protection of the weakest (Deut. 24:10-21; 27:19). Interest was not to be exacted from the poor (Deut. 23:20), and they were allowed to glean in the fields and vineyards and pluck enough to eat (Deut. 23:25, 24:19).

Fifth, because of the Hebrew assumption that a good judge

not only determines who is in the right but also attempts to correct the inequity of the case at hand, and because of the belief that Yahweh is committed to justice and righteousness, the Israelites came to believe that the Lord pays special attention to the disinherited among God's people. This view of the poor as God's special concern is found frequently in the Psalms (e.g., Pss. 10; 25; 34; 37). These Psalms express two things simultaneously: a refusal to accept one's poverty as the will of God; and a confidence that Yahweh will vindicate the plight of the oppressed poor (Ps. 70; Eccclus. 21:5; 35:13-17). Thus, the poor person comes to be understood as dependent on God, as specially devout because he or she does so in the midst of poverty, and as, therefore, humble and expectant before Yahweh.⁷

Sixth, given this religious interpretation of lowliness before God, humility (as a characteristic of the poor) came to be praised as a virtue (Eccclus. 3:17-20). The beginnings of Israel were tied up with acute awareness of its origins as a nation of slaves humbled and brought low in Egypt. Because of the goodness of Yahweh, who delivered them from intolerable humiliation and affliction, the Israelites could never regard Yahweh as the upholder of a social system built on pride and wealth. On the contrary, it is Yahweh who delivers the humble, but brings down the haughty (I Sam. 2:7; II Sam. 22:28). The concept of humility is thus in the Old Testament almost exclusively tied up with human beings who are in affliction, poverty, and suffering. Humility is the state of the poor, who must acknowledge their own utter helplessness and dependence upon Yahweh.

⁷Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I, 400-401.

It is only in relatively late texts, particularly after the destruction of Jerusalem, that the humility of the poor becomes a symbol of the righteous God-fearer. Humility can be attained by the rich as well as the poor, just as greed can characterize the poor as well as the wealthy (Ecclus. 31). Zephaniah is the only prophet who requires that humility and submission to the will of God be practiced along with justice (Zeph. 2:3). This viewpoint understands the rich person to be self-sufficient, believing himself or herself to no longer be in need of God because of the accumulation of wealth. In contrast, the poor (who have no materials or power) relate their entire existence to God and await the coming of God's justice for them (Ps. 9:11; 10:14; 34:9, 11; 37:40).

Finally, not long before Jesus' birth the Qumran community included a group which identified themselves as the "poor." They did not actually renounce wealth, but did practice community ownership of goods which was a precursor of the practice of the early Christian community. In defining themselves as poor, they made known their awareness of being oppressed; nevertheless, "their firm intention was to submit meekly to the demands of the Lord in whom they had put their faith."⁸

Despite the multitude of perspectives in the Old Testament regarding poverty and the poor, we can say that the general view is one in which physical poverty is considered to be evil. Even the spiritualizing of poverty recognizes that the physical fact is abnormal and creates dependence on God for liberation from the condi-

⁸Santa Ana, 10.

tion. Poverty is a constant and painful fact of life. Its consequences are the establishment of relationships of dependence and oppression, which lead to the elevation of the wealthy and powerful and the humiliation of the poor and disinherited. Concern for the poor and the alleviation of poverty are the special interest of Yahweh and the people of God.

The Old Testament attitude toward wealth helps clarify its attitude toward poverty.⁹ In the Old Testament wealth must be considered simultaneously with the synonymous term "riches." "Wealth" is used to translate two Hebrew words, *hon* and *hayil*, both meaning "faculty," "ability," or "power." They have come to have the metaphorical meaning "wealth," i.e., the tangible evidence of the ability to acquire and the power it gives over others. The term "riches" is most often used to translate the Hebrew root *'asher*. Wealth and riches usually refer to the abundance of property (land, buildings, agricultural commodities, livestock, and slaves), the basic measure of economic worth in an agricultural economy such as prevailed in Palestine.

The distinctive Old Testament attitude toward wealth is largely determined by the theological belief that Yahweh is Creator and Sovereign over all creation, and thus all things belong to God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). The goods of this world seem to be considered as nourishment which God gives to satisfy basic human needs, especially hunger. Even the least

⁹Details regarding the Old Testament vocabulary for and concept of wealth are found in F. W. Young, "Wealth," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, 818-819; Santa Ana, 2-3, 8-9.

privileged in society are to be guaranteed this basic requirement. Wealth is not to be regarded as possessions which may be accumulated (this is the meaning of the story in Exodus 16). Thus, the satisfaction of real needs is acceptable, but the unnecessary accumulation of wealth is severely judged. Throughout Israel's history, stern warnings are directed against those who strive for riches through greed, trickery, and treachery, and against the pride and glory in it (II Sam. 12; Is. 10:3; Jer. 5:27; 15:13; Ez. 7:11; 28; Hos. 12:8; Mic. 6:12). For example, the decadence of the kingdom of Solomon is understood by some to be the result of the policy of accumulating riches carried out at that time by the central authority in Israel and further accentuated by Solomon's successor (I Kings 12). In the view of the Old Testament, the accumulation of wealth constitutes a challenge to the lordship of God, and in this sense indicates a lack of faith and trust in Yahweh. As A. George points out:

The faithful of Yahweh consider above all that wealth is often linked with justice. The oppressors of the poor who are denounced by the prophets are presumably rich, although the prophets do not identify them as such (the identification of the "rich" as "wicked" comes only in Is. 53:9). It was, above all, the wisdom writers who sought to analyze how wealth leads to sin: these writers denounce wealth as the source of pride (Prov. 28:11), unbelief (Prov. 30:9), and, more precisely, false security based on worldly goods which turns men away from trust in God (Ps. 52:9; Prov. 11:28; Job 31:24, etc.). These experiences and judgments do not constitute a condemnation or rejection of wealth, although they call for a sense of proportion as to its value and moderation in its use (Prov. 30:7-9; Eccles. 5:17-19, etc.).¹⁰

Much more important than the accumulation of riches is the knowledge of God. For the writers of the Old Testament, the knowledge of God is revealed, at least in part, in a just attitude to the cause

¹⁰George, quoted in Santa Ana, 2-3.

of the poor. As Jeremiah said to Jehoiakim:

Shame on the man who builds his house by unjust means
and completes its roof-chambers by fraud,
making his countrymen work without payment,
giving them no wage for their labour!

Shame on the man who says, 'I will build a spacious house
with airy roof-chambers,
set windows in it, panel it with cedar
and paint it with vermilion'!

If your cedar is more splendid,
does that prove you a king?

Think of your father: he ate and drank,
dealt justly and fairly; all went well with him.
He dispensed justice to the lowly and poor;
did not this show he knew me? says the Lord.

(Jer. 22:13-16)

According to Jeremiah, anyone who accumulates wealth beyond his or her needs and to the detriment of others does not know God. Human injustice is contrary to divine righteousness.

Since wealth and poverty are relative terms, we can summarize by contrasting them according to the above findings. The wealthy person is self-sufficient. The accumulation of riches affects the person in such a way that there is no longer any apparent need to fear God. The poor, on the other hand, are those who have no worldly resources to support them, nor any social or political influence to count on. In the absence of goods or influence, they relate their entire existence to God, directing all their energies toward Yahweh and looking to Yahweh as the only source of their "salvation." As this posture of humility before Yahweh came to be understood as a characteristic trait attainable by those not in poverty as well as the poor, the definition of the "poor of Yahweh" developed to include those who, regardless of economic circumstances, were particularly

sensitive to the existence of physical poverty and injustice. Faced with the scandal of poverty and ready to act against it, the "poor of Yahweh" first addressed themselves to God through prayer. Several of these prayers have been recorded in the Old Testament, most notably in the Psalms. A good example of this is the prayer of the humiliated Anna in I Sam. 1:9-20. Many terms in this prayer appear in the song of Mary commonly known as The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). These prayers indicate their belief that only from God can they hope for the fulfillment of Yahweh's dreams for the poor.

Thus, in the Old Testament, the efforts to eliminate poverty are a matter of being open to history and, through participation in it, to the action of God which continually intervenes in history with its message of justice for the poor. In fact, the Bible's account of the struggle for justice for the people of Israel can only be properly understood in the context of God's efforts to correct injustice everywhere and for all people.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament vocabulary for poverty and the poor, as well as for wealth and riches, is less extensive than that of the Old Testament.¹¹ The word *ptōchos* is used most frequently to denote "poor." The word is related to *ptōssein*, "to bow down timidly," and means "destitute," "beggar," or simply "poor." It refers to complete destitution which forces the poor to be dependent on others

¹¹ Much of the material regarding the New Testament vocabulary for the poor and poverty is found in Wolfe, "Poor;" Keck; and Friedrich Hauck, "Ptochos," The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) VI, 886.

for support. *Ptōchos* is used in the Septuagint for *dalal* and *rush*, along with the word *penās*, which denotes a humble workman from the lowest economic class who must earn a living because he or she has no property. *Penās* occurs only once in the New Testament, in II Cor. 9:9, which is a quotation from Ps. 112:9.

Chreia is used several times to mean "to be in need, lack something." It can refer to the physical need of food (Mk. 2:25) or the need of basic economic goods (Acts 2:45, 4:35; Eph. 4:28; I John 3:17).

Tapeinos, *praūs*, and related words designate in the New Testament a kind of "humility," which is part of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Only rarely does humility in the New Testament have the overtly objective aspect of poverty, affliction, or low social status so common in Old Testament usage. Such a connotation appears where the reference is to an Old Testament passage (Mt. 5:5; Lk. 1:52), but most frequently it occurs in connection with Jesus as Messiah. The early Christians were quick to attribute to Jesus as King the humiliation often used to describe Israel's early kings. Furthermore, the form of God's servanthood through Jesus, which is seen as worthy of imitation, finds another precedent in various Greek humiliation traditions about their hero-kings: Heracles, Odysseus, Cyrus, and Alexander.¹² Jesus was humiliated in the sense that he was a King who took on poverty.

The vast majority of references to humility in the New Testament refer to subjective character traits not necessarily tied up

¹²Keck, 422.

with an objective situation of poverty (I Cor. 4:21; II Cor. 10:1; Phil. 2:8).¹³ It is sometimes connected to Old Testament passages which emphasize God's concern for the poor and resistance to the proud (II Cor. 7:6; Jas. 4:6). Christian humility is a lack of concern for one's own prestige (Rom. 12:16), and consequently valuation of others above self (Phil. 2:3). It is non-violent (I Cor. 4:21; Gal. 6:1; II Tim. 2:25). In Jas. 1:10, the old expectation of the exaltation of the poor and the humiliation of the rich is to be realized in the Christian community, but the economic difference is now irrelevant.

The frequent references to humility in the New Testament reveal that it was regarded as one of the most important traits of early Christian life. Since it is primarily an attitude and way of acting toward fellow humans, it does away with selfish pride, arrogance, and violence, and furnishes the possibility of peace and harmony within the human community. But it also contradicts the normal foundations of authority in human society, which are usually to be found in prestige, power, and wealth. This contrast between humility and prestige, oppression and power, poverty and wealth, can be found throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

While the concept of humility developed from a characteristic of the poor and powerless in their total dependence upon God for deliverance from oppression to an attitude of selflessness attainable by all regardless of their economic condition, the understanding of

¹³Material regarding the concept of humility in the New Testament is summarized from G. E. Mendenhall, "Humility," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, II, 659-660.

the poor and poverty remained essentially the same (although it was deepened by the life and teachings of Jesus). Jesus' concern for the poor is emphasized by the writer of the Gospel of Luke, especially in the material borrowed from the Q-source.¹⁴ For Q, Jesus is homeless (Mt. 8:20, Lk. 9:58) and directs his mission to the poor (Mt. 11:4-5; Lk. 7:22; cf. Is. 61:1). Q probably preserves Jesus' own understanding that the Kingdom of God will reverse the injustices of the present world. Thus, for Luke, Jesus' ministry to the poor is a concrete expression of the coming eschatological reversal and not merely a reflection of his socio-economic background or of a "proletarian" view of the Kingdom. The vast economic division between the poor and the wealthy joins the ranks of sickness, demon-possession, or self-righteousness as a sign of the need of the present world for redemption. Jesus did not romanticize the goodness of the poor, idealize poverty, nor regard wealth as inherently evil. His warnings against the dangers of wealth apply to both the rich and poor (Q: Mt. 6:24-34; Lk. 12:22-31; 16:13). The call to sell possessions and give the proceeds to the poor is apparently not intended to be a broad command, but is a call to risk earthly security in order to rely wholly on God (Lk. 12:33, cf. Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23). It is an opportunity to show mutuality with those to whom Jesus' ministry is specifically directed.

The writer of Luke strengthened the Q-source's emphasis on Jesus' concern for the poor in the independent material introduced into the gospel. The Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55), the story of the rich

¹⁴Keck, 673.

man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), and Jesus' refusal to become concerned about the equitable division of an inheritance, followed by the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21), are all found only in Luke's gospel. This picture of Jesus does not simply reflect the increase of wealthy persons in the church, but confronts that church with a Jesus who was poor himself and was concerned specifically with the poor.¹⁵

The imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God is central to Jesus' message to the poor. The images evoked by the concept of the Kingdom of God are not to be separated from the Near Eastern understanding of royalty.

From the third millennium before Christ, in Mesopotamia as well as in Egypt, the main function of the king was to ensure justice for his subjects. In exercising this prerogative, the king must take account of reality: his subjects include the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor. In the natural order of things, the powerful and rich would always manage to abuse their power to oppress and exploit the weak and the poor who, unable to defend themselves, would gradually founder in misery. It is the king's duty to restore the balance. By virtue of this duty, he is the defender of those who cannot defend themselves; he is the appointed protector of the poor, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed. The 'justice' which he must administer to his subjects will consist in guaranteeing the rights of the weak in face of the powerful, as well as repressing the rich who threaten the rights of the poor.¹⁶

No text makes Christ's presence among the poor more clear than Mt. 25:31-46. In this passage, the judge considers the unfortunate (the poor, hungry, naked, homeless, thirsty, prisoners and others) as the judge's brothers and sisters: what has been done to them has also been done to the judge. Those who follow Christ are to remain alert, so that they may recognize Christ's presence at

¹⁵Keck, 673.

¹⁶Santa Ana, 14.

any moment and serve Christ by serving the poor. This was and is the true attitude of the "poor of Yahweh," always open to meeting their God, even when least expected, in the humblest of their neighbors. The meaning of Christ's presence among the poor thus has a clear eschatological dimension. It does not mean that poverty is sanctified as a virtue, but rather that, while there are poor people, Christ's judgment is still to come. This is of vital importance to the church which, in the light of Mt. 25:31-46, defines its faithfulness to Jesus Christ in terms of its position vis-a-vis the challenge of the poor and poverty. The French Dominican, Benoit Dumas, relying on Mt. 25:31-46, has suggested that the poor belong to the basic understanding of the mystery of the Church; that is the poor belong to the understanding of the very nature of the Church.¹⁷ However, as Jose Miguez Bonino has pointed out,

. . . the Church does not recognize itself in the poor. It may recognize the poor as a very important part of the world, but the Church does not recognize itself in the poor, and the poor do not recognize Christ in the Church. But this situation is one of lost identity, or self-alienation for the Church, a situation in which the Church is not altogether the Church. The Church which is not the Church of the poor puts in serious jeopardy its churchly character. Therefore this becomes an ecclesiological criterion.¹⁸

The most problematic text regarding the poor and poverty in the message of Jesus is undoubtedly Luke 6:20. How could Jesus call the poor "blessed"? Many interpretations have been advanced.¹⁹ For example, a very literal interpretation would imply the acceptance of poverty as a norm. One must be poor, then, to live

¹⁷Ibid., 20. ¹⁸Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁹This analysis of Luke 6:20 follows that advanced in *ibid.*, 14ff.

a Christian life--an obligation which denies that the Gospel is given through grace, without impositions. Such a literal interpretation also says that those who enter the Kingdom of God will not be those who, as the "poor of Yahweh," live in total openness and availability to God's intervention in their lives and in history, but will be those who meet the economic criterion of poverty. This requirement for entry into the Kingdom places a condition on God and ignores the fact that poverty is a scandal and a manifestation of evil.

Others take Jesus' statement figuratively by spiritualizing the notion of poverty. This argument follows Matthew's version of the beatitude (Mt. 5:3), which emphasizes humility and self-effacement rather than the destitution of those who, because they are poor, are to be blessed. However, the texts themselves refute such a position. The texts include the poor among those who "weep" and those who "hunger." The words of Isaiah quoted in Luke 4 associate the poor with prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. It is thus clear that it would be incorrect to spiritualize the notion of the poor, since the context includes the poor among others who live in misery and misfortune and to whom Jesus proclaims the good news.

Why are the poor blessed? Obviously not because God has ordained their economic conditions, since the injustice of poverty will be reversed in the Kingdom. The text does not call us to resign ourselves to the existence of poverty, but to hope in the promises of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

If we believe that the Kingdom of God is a gift which is received in history, and if we believe, as the eschatological promises--so charged with human and historical content--indicate to us, that the Kingdom of God necessarily implies the reestablishment of justice in this world, then we must believe that Christ says that the poor are blessed because the Kingdom of God has begun:

'The time has come: the Kingdom of God is upon you' (Mark 1:15). In other words, the elimination of the exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human has begun; a Kingdom of justice which goes even beyond what they could have hoped for has begun. They are blessed because the coming of the Kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of brotherhood.²⁰

Thus, the reason for the blessing lies not in the economic circumstances of the poor, nor in their spiritual attitudes, but in the way in which God conceives the nature of the Kingdom. Such a conception understands that poverty is not a virtue but an evil which constitutes a challenge to the justice of God for all creation. Poverty is not blessed as an ideal for Christians to attain; it is, rather, the unhappy condition of many human beings, and the Creator rebels against it because it mocks the honor due to all creation and God's loving purpose for humankind.

Jesus' message to the rich concerning their wealth is equally clear.²¹ In the economic disparity between the rich and the poor, it is clearly the rich who run the greatest risk of God's judgment. Hence, Jesus' radical demand to the rich man who wanted to follow him, that he should sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 13:18-27). Jesus is clear that his disciples cannot serve two loyalties (Lk. 9:57-62; 14:26-33), including devotion to the acquisition of wealth (Mt. 6:24). "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:17-25).

²⁰Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973) 298.

²¹The following paragraphs regarding Jesus' message to the rich summarize Santa Ana, 23ff.

Jesus' call to the rich man to give to the poor is a call to give to all those who are in need: the poverty-stricken, sick, weak, helpless, oppressed, and so on. They are the ones who deserve a sign of justice which announces the arrival of the Kingdom. For the rich man, such an act of righteousness would serve as evidence of his anxious anticipation of the Kingdom of righteousness. Furthermore, it is a sign of a fundamental change of heart from loyalty to wealth to loyalty to the Kingdom of justice.

The command to give alms is central to the teachings of Jesus regarding the poor and poverty. And yet, this command is often misunderstood.

In current usage, the term refers to a gift offered to the needy for love of God. This gift very often has no profound effect on the life of the receiver, and it is generally understood as assistance which alleviates his condition without allowing him to overcome it. The term comes from the Latin alimosna, from the Greek elemosyne, used by the LXX translators to indicate an action of justice (the sedaqa) which, according to the Old Testament, is in accordance with the fulfilment of the will of God. Consequently, the duty of almsgiving should not be understood as the gift of something which causes us great problems if we are deprived of it, but rather as a sign of the saving justice of the Kingdom.²²

This does not mean that Jesus ignores the fact that the basic material needs of humanity must be met. While Jesus did say that humans must not live by bread alone (Mt. 4:4), his statement also assumes that one cannot live without bread. This is why the prayer he taught his disciples says: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11). To ask for bread today does not mean to be in want of bread always, nor does it mean asking for more bread than is necessary (especially when the accumulation of wealth represented by more food

²²Ibid., 26.

than necessary often implies that others go without their daily bread).

Thus, it would be an over-simplification to suggest that following Christ consists of being poor. The path indicated by Jesus is not poverty in itself, but the life of love which takes the form of concern and action on behalf of the needy—solidarity with the poor and exploited. The example of Christ on the cross shows that the disciple is called to participate in the constant and painful effort of God to reinstate the way of justice, which has been distorted by humankind in its race for wealth and power. "This means we must become incarnate (as God was incarnate in Jesus Christ), identifying ourselves with the victims of injustice, who hope for a better tomorrow."²³ Christian poverty, then, as an expression of love, is solidarity with the poor and a protest against poverty.

THE EARLY CHURCH

Although the early Christians were generally poor, there is no evidence to indicate that they were either destitute or that they deliberately impoverished themselves as in a vow of Christian poverty.²⁴ The early Jerusalem church apparently did, at the outset, share wealth among its members. However, it is difficult to know the exact form which this sharing took. Only two actual cases are reported—the first in Acts 4:36-37, and the second in Acts 5:1-11. Other summaries of this activity are somewhat inconsistent, no doubt caused in part by the fact that they were written some fifty years

²³Ibid., 33.

²⁴Information regarding the poor in the early church may be found in Keck.

later and probably originated outside of Palestine. According to Acts 2:45 and 4:34-35, the Christians in Jerusalem shared their wealth in order to meet actual and immediate needs; however, Acts 2:44 and 4:32 seem to imply that they practiced the total abolition of private property. To further complicate the issue, some property appears to have remained under private ownership, for it is said that the early community met in private homes (Acts 2:46; 12:12). There is no evidence that Christians in other localities practiced community ownership of wealth.

The Christian churches in the Greco-Roman world also began with memberships taken largely from the poor, but gradually wealthier persons were attracted to the movement. The Acts of the Apostles mentions converts who apparently had means (Acts 16:14-15; 17:4, 12; 18:3, 8). The diverse economic status of Paul's churches is reflected in I Cor. 11:22; II Cor. 8:2; 9:2. Even so, Paul did not (in the extant letters) warn against the moral dangers of wealth, although his successor did (I Tim. 2:9; 3:8; 6:5-10, 17-19). Paul did, however, use the language of the poor and poverty in reflecting on the significance of the Christ-event. For example, he affirmed that God has chosen what is weak, poor, and despised in the world (I Cor. 1:18-30). He emphasized the importance of imitating Christ in the attitude of self-humiliation and self-denial (Phil. 2:5-8; II Cor. 8:9). Paul exhorts his hearers to openness to and anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 7:17, 20, 24; I Thess. 4:11-12; II Thess. 3:7-10). Paul understands that Kingdom to represent the establishment of divine justice, based on love, which corrects the distortions caused by human sin. The Apostle never

allowed the community to support him financially, and he felt that everyone should meet his or her own needs through work when possible (I Thess. 4:12). This was to avoid putting obstacles in the way of the proclamation of the Gospel (I Cor. 9:12ff.) and because of his self-awareness of being a "servant of Christ" (Gal. 6:6; I Tim. 5:17; I Cor. 9:7). The determining factor for Paul is always what God has done in Christ.

The explanation of the Parable of the Sower found in Mark is sensitive to the issue of poverty (Mk. 4:19), and the author of the Revelation of John warns the Church at Laodicea not to be proud of its wealth (Rev. 3:17). Nowhere is the bitter hatred of wealth expressed as sharply as in the Epistle of James (esp. 2:1-7; 5:1-6).

Concern for the poor was a standard theme of early Christian teachings (I Thess. 4:12; Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 6:17-19; Jas. 1:27; 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:17). The most eloquent statement of this motif is the Parable of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46). Wealth is always considered to be something which does not help the human being receive the justice of God.

In addition to the collection for the needy in the Jerusalem Church, Acts reports that the Antioch Church sent Paul and Barnabas with money to Jerusalem during a famine (Acts 11:27-30). Paul regarded the offering as a sign of the solidarity of the church and of thanksgiving for the gospel (Rom. 15:27). The collection had not just the meaning of a simple act of charity, but that of an act of faith, inasmuch as it documents their connection with the history of salvation. It becomes a symbol of the advent of the Kingdom and the reign of God.

CONCLUSION²⁵

1. The concept of poverty in the Scriptures is not limited solely to economic poverty. It refers rather to the dependent, whose life is limited, who therefore look to God to change their condition and bring justice. So poverty can never be considered a virtue; it is the result of evil, or, if you like, of the injustice which prevails in human relations. However, since the poor live in hope of justice, poverty becomes a condition for true piety—the quality of those who suffer but nevertheless continue to hope in the Lord and remain humble before God.

2. Jesus confirms this privilege of the poor, since He proclaims that they are to inherit the Kingdom. God, who undertakes to correct human mistakes, will give the keys of the Kingdom to the poor, for in the Kingdom justice will reign. It is natural that the victims of injustice and exploitation should be the first to receive the privilege of the Kingdom. Moreover, in Jesus we find a model of the way of life of the poor man who is also a "servant of Yahweh"; he is not resigned to his poverty, but practices the hope which kindles hope in others too.

3. All this implies a grave judgment on those who base their existence on the accumulation of wealth. Jesus' message to them is very clear: "God or Mammon. A man cannot serve two masters." Jesus calls the rich to renounce the goods of this world so that, through this act, they can prove that God—the God of justice and love, who

²⁵Santa Ana, 95-97.

is the Lord--is in their hearts, but also so that they can show solidarity with those who suffer injustice and need caused by others' covetousness and love of riches. The rejection of the eagerness to accumulate wealth is one of the marks of the disciple of Jesus. The rich, more than any other social group, are the ones who must give up their wealth if they seriously desire to follow Jesus. This is why it is so difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. The road to the Kingdom, at least for the rich, is signposted by the search for justice, in whose service they must offer their possessions as a sign of charity and solidarity with the less privileged, with those in the lowest rank of the social pyramid. This, too, was the road followed by God in Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

4. In the Christian communities of the first century after Christ, this understanding of the Gospel message concerning the poor and poverty was expressed in various ways which, though different, certainly had clear points of convergence. On the one hand, there was the community ownership of goods, first practised among Christians in the Jerusalem community. Spiritual communion, the practice of the eucharist itself, was confirmed by this means of expressing basic solidarity among believers. Love between the faithful found concrete expression through the common ownership of possessions which, while not obligatory, was seen as a sign of the justice of the Kingdom so anxiously awaited by the first-generation Christians. On the other hand, in the thinking of St. Paul as recorded in his Epistles, while the theme of poverty is not a priority, there was a clear indication

that fraternal community requires active charity within the Church. Hence his eagerness to obtain funds for "the saints of Jerusalem". He urges the people to whom he writes to share with others, not by placing poverty in general on a pedestal of virtue, but offering as an example "the gift of Christ", who gave up his own divine condition to redeem humanity and the rest of creation.

However, it is in the Epistle of James that we find the most radical message (apart from Jesus') on the place which must be accorded to the poor in the Christian community and also on the Christian attitude towards the rich. For the author of this New Testament document, it is the rich who are "double-minded"; that is, they live in a tension of indecision between following Jesus and loving wealth. This is the reason for his denunciation. On the other hand, James says that the poor are those who look for the Kingdom and its justice, and therefore they do not give their hearts to earthly things; they are in a better condition to practice true piety which cares for the lowliest (the "orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep [themselves] unstained from the world"—James 1:27).

Chapter 3

THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Throughout its history the Christian Church has been deeply concerned with issues of social welfare. However, individual concern for the public well-being was not a Christian innovation. The natural roots of charity—the paternal and maternal impulse, sympathy for suffering, and pity of the strong for the weak—were all present in the primitive community. In Hebraic antiquity a growing social conscience was clearly involved in the development of religion, particularly beginning with the eighth-century prophetic movement. Indeed, gifts of individuals to private and public philanthropic concerns were commonplace in the pre-Christian Roman Empire. Contributions then provided for facilities used by the general public such as libraries, baths, aqueducts, theatres, roads, and temples, as well as sponsoring public events.

WELFARE BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND
THE FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES

When Christianity entered upon the world scene, it made at least five significant contributions to the use of money for the general welfare. As described by Kenneth Scott Latourette,² the first

¹Indebtedness is acknowledged to the following for much of the factual material in the following section: Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1953); Haskell M. Miller Compassion and Community (New York: Association Press, 1961); Reinhold Niebuhr, The Contribution of Religion to Social Work (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932)

²Latourette, I, 247-248.

innovation was that Christianity made giving an obligation for all its adherents—rich and poor alike—because it was believed that each should contribute as he or she was able. This belief was manifested in the early prominence of the collection in the Eucharistic ritual. Secondly, the motive for charitable giving became, with the advent of Christianity, the expression of love as a response of thanksgiving to the love of Christ, "who, though he was rich, yet for the sake of those who were to follow him became poor, that they through his poverty might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9). Thirdly, the objects of their beneficence changed from objects of public use to support of people: the widows, orphans, sick, and disabled, as well as those who were unemployed and imprisoned because of their faith. Furthermore, it obtained the release of those who were enslaved because of their faith, entertained travellers, and aided fellow churches who were suffering from famine or persecution. The fourth innovation Christianity brought to welfare was that its love and service was not limited to members of the Church; it was extended to non-Christians as well. The New Testament instructed Christians to do good to all people, remembering Jesus' parable describing care for the unknown stranger upon whom misfortune had fallen. Lastly, it is important that in Christianity giving was personalized. It was not impersonal service to masses of people, although in times of famine it frequently dealt with large numbers, but it poured itself out to individuals, believing that each had the same worth in the sight of God, one "for whom Christ died."

The love spirit of the early church, motivated by the recent inspiring example of Jesus, the sense of religious community and soli-

darity expressed in the "body of Christ" mysticism of Paul, and the sense of abandon inspired by the anticipated impending return of Christ eventually gave way to influences in the culture in which it was immersed. Furthermore, the legitimization of the church in the Edict of Toleration in 313 A. D. by Constantine accelerated the assimilation of secular culture by at least in part removing the natural sense of closeness in a numerically weak community living in a hostile world. Even though some of the more inspiring moments of Christian giving were ended, voluntary philanthropy involving love and self-sacrifice as well as material goods for the needy continued in a more deeply personal vein for giver as well as receiver than had been the case in earlier times. It is clear that much of the rapid spread of Christianity can be attributed to its humanitarian compassion in the face of persecution, poverty, and insecurity. The oppressed saw how the Christians cared for their sick, the widows, the children, the disabled, and the unemployed. They risked their own imprisonment to aid prisoners condemned to work in the mines. Great sympathy, acclaim, and strength for the Christian cause was aroused even among the wealthy by their relief work, such as in Alexandria and Carthage, for example, where "through a series of terrible epidemics they stayed on and ministered to the sick and dying after able-bodied pagans had fled in panic."³ While the first hospitals were apparently begun by Julian the Apostate, their real development occurred under Christian auspices in the sixth century, sometimes by directive of the hierarchy and sometimes under the influence of the monasteries.⁴ The

³Miller, 30. ⁴Niebuhr, 6.

development of institutional charity expanded into employment services, orphanages, and schools.

The early church saw, as the church grew from small intimate groups to a large-scale movement, direct personal charity slowly give way to more formally organized programs of assistance administered under the leadership of bishops or other officials. Indiscriminate almsgiving became the average Christian's only recourse to this depersonalized charity. Under Christian influence the state began to be actively involved in charitable causes.

The Middle Ages saw a continuation of the trend toward institutional charity, even though the condition of the church periodically bordered on complete corruption. As the government of the Roman Empire fell, the church, which had always taken care of its own sick, orphans, widows, and others in need, now found itself charged with the tremendous responsibility of caring for practically all of the social welfare obligations of the state. By the time the Roman state had disappeared, substantial wealth and power had already begun to fall into the hands of the church such that it was able to take care of a large portion of the need. Much of the activity came from the monastic movement which, although in some respects individualistic and indifferent to social problems, represented a tremendous social and philanthropic activity. Through them "the poor were fed, the peasant was instructed in agriculture, the arts were kept alive and education was developed."⁵ Although the monasteries suffered from the periodic fluctuation in moral quality experienced by the whole

⁵Ibid., 6.

church, they, more than is commonly recognized, in their net result encouraged more than any other the Medieval attitude that selfless devotion to prisoners, the poor, the sick, and other unfortunates was the mark of the ideal Christian.⁶

The bishops were also agents of Christian charity. Despite the tendency of historians to recount numerous episodes of ecclesiastical graft and bishops who spent their funds in riotous living and warfare, the records are replete with authentic stories of good bishops who conscientiously completed their charitable duties.⁷

Christian ideals of responsibility for social welfare began to filter into the laity. Socially, Medieval Europe was a rather tightly stratified society. Yet consciences were beginning to become uneasy.

No one could hear, day after day or Sunday after Sunday, the Magnificat, with its affirmation that God had put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree and that He had filled the hungry with good things and had sent the rich empty away, without sometime becoming aware of its contradiction of what he saw about him. The Christian teaching was that slaves had souls and equally with their masters could be heirs of eternal salvation.⁸

Furthermore, the profound otherworldliness of Medieval people and the preoccupation of the church with the fate of the individual in the life to come, combined with the legalistic interpretation of Scripture regarding the covering of a multitude of sins by charity, made penance performed through acts of charity customary. This use of charity to attain salvation became an abuse so severe that it was a major spark in the Protestant Reformation. And yet, through it

⁶Miller, 34-35. ⁷Niebuhr, 6-7. ⁸Latourette, I, 558.

good works were increasingly performed in behalf of the oppressed. Now not only members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were concerned about the needy, but the laity were also increasingly sharing in this labor. Hospitals and asylums were founded and maintained by wealthy individuals and by associations for the sick, crippled, aged, lepers, prostitutes, pilgrims, and travellers. It was customary for masters who were nearing death to release their slaves in an act of benevolence designed to work for the salvation of the landowner's soul. The position of women was raised. Significantly, official documents of the period continued to explain such acts as motivated by concern for fellow humanity, the example of Christ, the hope of salvation, and love for God.⁹

In spite of the expanded philanthropic concern of the Medieval church, institutional Christianity in the Middle Ages was not interested in changing the basic organization of society through which many of the social problems it sought to aid came into being. "The Medieval period had a static conception of society which made it quite impossible to think of social problems in terms of their progressive elimination."¹⁰ As a result the poor were often regarded as God-given objects of the charity of the rich, whose salvation was attained by such philanthropy. Such far-reaching social goals as the elimination of poverty was thus outside the bounds of the Christian social spirit.

As the church's institutional charity programs grew, a lack of personal concern for the recipient by the giver became an ever-

⁹Niebuhr, 7-8. ¹⁰Ibid., 7.

increasing problem. Almsgiving became a callous and perverted expression of selfishness and indifference. Concern for the welfare of those in need was subordinated to interest in heavenly reward.

Two points of interest should be noted in conclusion to the church's activity in social welfare during the Medieval period. One is that, despite various problems and failures in the church, it nurtured an attitude that the total social process—church, state, and other social institutions—should be involved in the general welfare of society and expressing the ideal of a Christian civilization. Instead of making a radical distinction between "the world" of social and political institutions and the church (as had the early Christians), the Medieval church sought to become a comprehensive, unifying whole, embracing social and political institutions within its reach. "It crystallized the conviction that the discharge of this responsibility in humanitarian concern is an obligation of political and social institutions as well as of the church, whether or not these institutions are under the control of the church."¹¹

Secondly, although most charity and welfare work was done either directly or indirectly under the auspices of the church, several secular sources of welfare also arose at this time.¹² Many of the feudal estates, in order to assure themselves of an adequate base of human labor, provided for the basic welfare needs of their people. There were so many of these programs that when Charlemagne came to power on Christmas Day, 800, he attempted to standardize and regulate them. As urbanization created slums in the cities, many towns built

¹¹Miller, 38. ¹²Ibid.

and maintained their own hospitals, asylums, and other charity programs. The craft guilds also had programs for their members. It would be at best difficult to determine how many of these are to be attributed to influence by the church or can be traced to completely different sources.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a period of general social turmoil and change. Feudal economies and the Holy Roman Empire collapsed, eliminating the church's primary instrument of political control. Urbanization, nationalism, and commercialization were well under way. In the church, mismanagement of revenues for hospitals, endowments, poor relief, and other charity programs reached such proportions that "civil authorities, armed with increasing power and independence, had begun to step in with considerable frequency to force reforms."¹³ Partially in response to these abuses, two reformations were generated in Europe, one the Protestant and the other the Catholic, both of which were dedicated "to cleanse the Church and bring it to a closer approximation of the Christian ideal."¹⁴ The Protestant Reformation, led principally by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, sought to accomplish this task from outside the church; the Catholic Reformation, led principally by Ignatius Loyola, sought to correct the abuses from within.¹⁵

Because of the affinity between the Protestant and nationalist causes, most of the Protestant bodies immediately became state churches, placing themselves largely under the control of secular authorities. Thus, the Protestants looked at the relationship between

¹³Ibid., 39.

¹⁴Latourette, II, 698.

¹⁵Miller, 39-40.

church and the social order in a different light from Medieval Catholicism; Luther himself saw this relationship as a marked distinction between the religious order, which dealt only with the spiritual needs of the masses, and the secular order, in which social and political needs were met entirely by the government. (Of course, it was generally expected that the government would be ruled by a Christian conscience.)¹⁶

Probably the greatest influence of the Protestant Reformation on the development of social welfare was its regulation of the responsibility for social welfare directly to the government. This was the first clearly defined attempt at delineating welfare as a public responsibility and not as a distinct obligation of the church. Despite this trend, the Protestant churches continued to a large degree the traditional work of the church in social welfare. In addition, they became in most cases the primary administrators of state welfare services which had been taken over by the government.¹⁷

However, the quality of religious benevolence declined with the onset of Protestantism. As Reinhold Niebuhr notes:

It was inevitable that the Protestant Reformation should destroy some of the finest fruits of the medieval social spirit. Protestantism protested against the externalities of sacramentalism in the name of a purer and more personal mysticism, but it failed to recognize that sacramentalism breeds not only the vice of externalism but the virtue of appreciation for the problems of society. The sacramental church has a feeling for both the church and the state as a social organism which the more individual types of religious mysticism lack. Inevitably Protestantism bred an individualism which found it difficult, if not¹⁸ impossible, to preserve the best in the medieval social tradition.

Luther denounced the selfish Medieval motivations for char-

¹⁶Ibid., 40. ¹⁷Ibid., 41. ¹⁸Niebuhr, 9.

ity, such as penance and works to ensure future salvation. He insisted that religious benevolence should be voluntarily motivated by love arising out of a spirit of gratitude. This emphasis on voluntarism and sympathetic identification with the plight of the needy was accompanied by a shift from ecclesiastical authoritarianism, with its promises of future rewards, forgiveness of sins, and release from suffering in purgatory; this in turn resulted in a rather significant reduction in benefactions. Luther countered this development by suggesting that the local authorities forbid begging and establish "a 'common chest' in every parish to receive 'regular contributions' and 'voluntary gifts' of money, food, and clothing for the assistance of the needy. 'Regular contributions' hinted strongly at the principle of general taxation."¹⁹

Nonetheless, even Luther himself admitted that his ideal did not work. Speaking of the effects of his work on charitable giving, Luther said:

Before when men served the devil all pocketbooks were open; under the papacy everyone seemed generous and tender, men gave willingly with both hands and with grateful devotion in order that a false worship might be maintained. Now that it would be natural for men to be generous and considerate in gratitude to God for the holy Gospel, many perish and die of starvation while everyone wants to preserve rather than share his possessions.²⁰

The Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith led to a quietism and creedalism which tagged all social and ethical actions as attempts to work one's own salvation. It was natural that this reaction to the old forms of charity should destroy every vestige of the

¹⁹Miller, 41. ²⁰Quoted in Niebuhr, 10.

philanthropic spirit. Even though the general social confusion of the sixteenth century pricked the social conscience of many Protestant congregations for the sake of alleviating the misery of the poor, and in some instances did a rather remarkable job, no general system of philanthropy was established.²¹

During this period the Catholic Church was itself going through a Reformation. At this time the Church was shaping its charitable institutions into the foundational forms of its contemporary enterprises. France manifested the most mature development of these programs, under the work of Francis of Sales and Vincent de Paul. These men placed the hospitals under the supervision of the Sisters of Charity, created the Sons of Charity, founded institutions for orphans, and in general used the social resources of the Church for philanthropic causes.²²

To say that personal charity was greatly curtailed by Protestantism is not to say that the Protestant churches did not have a sense of social responsibility. On the contrary, the Protestants merely changed the instruments by which they manifested their social concern. The Protestant drive for welfare was not evidenced, as in Catholicism, by monasticism: where monasticism tended to withdraw from society as a whole and work with individuals, Protestantism preferred to work actively in society. While personal involvement in charitable activities declined, the Protestant world-view allowed Protestants to become increasingly concerned about social institutions and traditions which produced poverty and oppression. The

²¹Ibid. ²²Ibid., 11.

Protestants no longer viewed society as static; their vision of a secular government with a Christian conscience gave rise to philosophies of social change.²³

Protestantism was thus able to do much that monasticism was not able to do; and yet it simultaneously deprived itself of the ecclesiastical organization and coercion available through that same monasticism. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that the Protestant concern for social welfare was never manifested in charitable institutions and agencies under church control like hospitals and orphanages to such an extent as it had been in Catholicism. Protestantism, in fact, never intended it to be so. Instead, Protestantism encouraged social welfare through activities such as influencing state sponsored charities; starting social reforms which alleviated many of the social causes of suffering and oppression among the poor, and emphasizing thrift and industry, which moved many people beyond the need for relief. This work required an emphasis which was finally accomplished with the efforts of the Pietistic Movement as Protestant philanthropy became effective.²⁴

Despite its new interest in institutional social reform, the emphasis of the Protestant church on thrift and industry, and the requirement and dignity of work created simultaneously its most persistent problem in the field of social welfare. Because such a view held limited acknowledgement of the social causes of destitution which were beyond the control of the individual, it fostered an attitude (particularly among the common people) that economic distress on the

²³Miller, 41-42. ²⁴Ibid.

part of an able-bodied person was a sign of sinfulness or laziness--"a mark of inferiority and divine disfavor meriting social stigmatization."²⁵ Such an attitude has persisted in some forms to the present--in this country, aided markedly by the "Social Darwinism" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries--although advances in the social sciences have gone far to eliminate them.

At the dawning of the modern era, the church had already laid down the foundations upon which social welfare programs of the contemporary Western world are built. From its inception to the present, the Christian Church has faced the problem of adapting a social ethic designed for small, intimate, informal groups into the increasingly complex and massive social structures of society. In such a struggle, keeping the charitable impulse true to the spirit of Jesus and the unqualified response to those in need of the Good Samaritan has oscillated between keeping welfare free of extreme sentimentality, on the one hand, and the calculating self-interest of persons and institutions, on the other. Through a series of great struggles--the outcomes of which were sometimes victorious, sometimes failures--the church was able to maintain, at least in ideal, the personal and individual concern for the disadvantaged exemplified by the early Christians while simultaneously expanding its awareness of the broader social ills which were at the root of the problems it tried to solve. As the American colonies began to be settled, Christianity posited a social welfare front comprised of public, church, and individual agents.

²⁵Ibid., 42.

WELFARE IN THE UNITED STATES

Social welfare during the period when the American colonies were being founded can be described in several ways. First of all, it was a period when Christian ideals such as "mercy, love, justice, sharing, the worth of persons, and the responsibility of all to be compassionate and helpful to the weak and distressed, were beginning to take root in the general social consciousness."²⁶ Secondly, the idea that there was a public responsibility for social welfare to be expressed by the government was gradually being accepted. Third, all the while the church was not withdrawing from its role in welfare, either. It was, however, redefining its role as one of teacher, conscience, inspirer, and supporter of the state, serving as a paradigm for the state in matters of social welfare instead of serving as chief administrator of its welfare programs.²⁷

The transition from church dominance to state dominance in social welfare was neither easy nor immediate. And yet an understanding of this shift is necessary for an understanding of the role of the church in social welfare today, as well as an understanding of the status of welfare in contemporary American society. To adequately relate this movement, however, we must first return to an earlier period of history and look in more detail at how social welfare developed in England, the country whose laws and traditions most influenced the development of American culture.

Philanthropic developments in England during the Middle Ages were not strikingly different from the trends which were general

²⁶Ibid., 51. ²⁷Ibid.

throughout most of Europe. Feudalism, the church, and various guilds and fraternities functioned there much as they did elsewhere. Such marginal adaptations as were necessary to adjust the processes of change to the English situation, however, established patterns and pointed directions which have had great bearing on social welfare developments in America. In a sense, they are a very real part of the history of public welfare in the United States.²⁸

The destruction of the Medieval economy and social structure was heightened in England by the enclosure movement of the woolens industry which served to greatly increase the profits of the landowners and greatly increase the poverty of the serfs by removing them from tillage of the land so that sheep could be raised.²⁹ A series of natural disasters—including crop failures, famines, pestilence, and disease, beginning with the Black Death of 1348-1349 which killed almost a third of England's population—greatly increased the sufferings and hardships of many. The dissolution of the monasteries and other church property by Henry VIII in 1536 in the wake of the Protestant Reformation turned many out to join the ranks of the poverty-stricken who had lived or been employed in ecclesiastical institutions.

The earliest attempts to battle the growing poverty problem were essentially measures designed to regulate labor rather than meet the needs of the less fortunate. The most important piece of legislation of this type was the Statute of Laborers (1349) which

²⁸Ibid., 54-55.

²⁹Indebtedness is acknowledged to the following for much of the factual material in the following paragraphs: Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, Vol. 6-8 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); Samuel Mencher, Poor Law to Poverty Program (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967) 3-37; and Walter I. Trattner, From Poor Law to Welfare State (New York: Free Press, 1974) 1-12.

fixed maximum wages, imposed travel restrictions on the needy and unemployed, and compelled the jobless to work for any employer willing to hire them. It also forbade charity to able-bodied persons. The social conditions were more powerful than the laws designed to stop them, however, and measures became more and more repressive until the two decades between 1520 and 1540, when the state took the first steps toward an organized system of poor relief. Although acts during this period such as the Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars (1536)--the Henrician Poor Laws--were still essentially repressive pieces of legislation, through them the government began to exercise increasing responsibility for the relief of persons in economic distress. These laws made distinctions between the able-bodied who refused to seek work and the poor who could not work and thus needed relief, setting aside areas in which the latter were authorized to beg. They instructed local public officials to seek resources from voluntary contributions in the churches to care for the poor and infirm, thereby establishing the local parish government as the unit for poor relief. Monies which were collected could also be used to provide work for the able-bodied unemployed. Children were also taken care of. The next logical step was the enactment in 1572 of a measure which provided for compulsory taxation for poor relief when voluntary donations failed to meet the need. Through these provisions, then,

the state, through civil and church authorities, assumed responsibility for the relief of all its poor, old and young, impotent and able-bodied alike. It was a serious³⁰ attempt to cope with the economic and social problems of the age.

³⁰Trattner, 9.

The principles established by this early legislation--relief locally financed and administered for local residents through a combination of direct grants-in-aid to the unemployable and apprenticeship and work relief for the able-bodied--embodied most of the principles incorporated in the famous Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 (43 Elizabeth, Chapter 2), which set the pattern for governmental participation in social welfare in the United States for the next three hundred years. The Poor Law, like its legislative predecessors, contained many harsh and repressive features. It strongly affirmed the principle of family responsibility by making automatically ineligible any person who had a husband, wife, parent, or child able to support him. Punishment for vagrants who were unwilling to work continued to be swift and severe. However, the law also had many constructive features, including its assumption that the government had a responsibility to aid those in need, and that the needy indeed had a legal right to the state's assistance. Furthermore, the statute defined three categories of dependents and outlined the type of assistance to be given each: children, who received apprenticeships; for the able-bodied, work; and either home ("outdoor") or institutional ("indoor") relief for those needy unable to work. The law firmly established responsibility for the needy with the most basic level of local government, to be administered through the officials of the church parish.

So while the basic principles of public assistance did not originate in 1601--for poor relief had been a matter of public concern long before that time--the Elizabethan Poor Law brought together, in a single coherent statute, the "inconsistent and erratic relief legislation of the previous" years, firmly placing its operation in the hands of civil authorities and establishing

a definite system of obligatory financing outside the church.³¹

Haskell M. Miller summarizes, in part, the significance of the English poor laws on American social welfare as follows:³²

1. Poor relief, which had been a voluntary and unrestricted activity, primarily of the church, was recognized as a state responsibility and brought under its regulation.
2. Discriminatory classification of the destitute was begun.
3. Compulsory measures became necessary as a substitute for voluntary financing of poor relief.
4. The principle of local responsibility under state regulation was firmly established.
5. Repressive and punitive approaches to the problem of poverty, though they prevailed for a long while, gradually gave way to more constructive approaches.

This was the system of poor relief that was transplanted to America by the early colonists. It remained much the same for many years, with many of its assumptions being still the base of social welfare in America today. Significant changes have been made, however, and they fall to a large extent in three major periods of American history—three periods which many commentators have also observed to constitute the times of greatest change in the general social life of the American public. These periods are (1) the years 1830-1850, when immigration, urbanization, and industrialization first had their greatest impact on American life; (2) the years 1930-1940, when the Depression resulted in greater welfare needs; and (3) the decade of the 1960's, when more social welfare legislation was passed than the nation had ever seen before. The present discussion describes briefly the significance of these three periods as they unfolded in the history

³¹Ibid., 11-12.

³²Miller, 55-59.

of social welfare in America from colonial times to the present.

Colonial America did not escape the evils of poverty, even though it was rich in natural resources and free open lands. From the beginning, each colony had to care for the poor of every kind--the aged, sick, lame, and lazy. The presence of poverty and dependency was not looked upon as a flaw in society or in the needy: it was accepted as a fact of life, a part of the social order. Life was hard, and stable social patterns were few--most early settlers came poor and stayed poor. This is reflected in the estimates that over half of the entire colonial population originally arrived as indentured servants.³³ Even as the colonial economy matured and profits rose from commercial and agricultural pursuits, the increasingly complex economy brought periodic business, employment, wage and profit fluctuation. Poverty was thus common in America from earliest times, and public assistance based on the patterns of the mother country appeared rapidly. These were administered locally, by the town in New England, the parish (largely through church officials) in the South, and by a combination of these in the Middle Colonies.³⁴ To say that public assistance was the rule is certainly not to exclude the churches from social welfare functions in the colonies. The Christian faith was so much a part of the lives of the leading colonists that it was inevitable that the church become actively involved in social welfare. In most colonies, there was the self-conscious policy of union of church and state. Furthermore, that same sense of religious

³³Raymond A. Mohl, "Three Centuries of American Public Welfare: 1600-1932," Current History 65 (July 1973) 6.

³⁴Ibid., 6-7.

saturation in colonial life blurred the distinction between public and sectarian administration and funding. Thus Atkins and Fagley could say that in colonial America, and particularly in New England,

the town looked upon the church as part of itself . . . [and] the church naturally felt its responsibility for the well-being of the town. There have scarcely ever been communities where the poor and needy were more carefully, though frugally, looked after than obtained in the New England towns under the rule of democratic town meetings. In these town meetings church people have always taken an active part in behalf of justice and well-being. . . . [Indeed, the fellowship of the churches had] for its mission the cure³⁵ of injustice and the lifting of the level of the whole of life.

Corporate giving through state and church agencies was supplemented by the work of private citizens who often gave freely to their friends and neighbors who were in need. Even so, assistance was limited well into the eighteenth century by the general lack of substantial resources. By the time of the Great Awakening in the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century, private fortunes began to increase and wealth became distributed and fluid enough to make widespread giving possible.³⁶

The series of revivals known collectively as the Great Awakening, brief yet intense, had some immediate impact on social welfare. At the time of its peak under George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and others, it was essentially concerned with religion as a deeply personal experience. This individualistic character severely crippled the colonial churches' monopoly on the public conscience and opened up possibilities of a whole religious existence outside the established

³⁵Gaius Glenn Atkins and Frederick L. Fagley, History of American Congregationalism (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1942) 247.

³⁶Walter I. Trattner, "Private Charity in America: 1700-1900," Current History 65 (July 1973) 25.

forms of worship. While the Great Awakening caused the number of churches, sects, and church members to grow, leaving behind an intact and flourishing religious and sectarian charity program, in the long run it sparked a slow consuming fire which developed vast new interests in secular and humanitarian philanthropies originating both within and without the churches. Philanthropy and humane attitudes were popularized at all levels of society, particularly among the poor. People looked up to benefactors such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Bond, Benjamin Rush, George Washington, Jonathan Mayhew, and others.³⁷

Even though many people were touched by the rise of efforts to relieve suffering and remedy collective evils, still they concerned themselves little with political or economic structures. This was due in large degree to the prevailing Calvinistic theology of the colonies. In stressing salvation by faith alone, the Reformed faith rejected efforts to win merit by doing good works. Furthermore, it had no monastic orders, which were the prime instruments of Catholic charity in the Old World. Calvinism taught that every Christian should regard his/her chosen vocation as a call of God to which he/she should respond with conscientious work. The Christian was to seek to produce what was useful in the community, not be idle, selfish, or wasteful. It was obvious to the Calvinists that God in wisdom had blessed some--those who did what they should--while the lazy and impudent had incurred God's disfavor and thus were deprived of material blessings. It was not within the Calvinist mind to challenge this

³⁷Trattner, From Poor Law, 33-34.

God-ordered social stratification.

While believing that it was not in accord with the Scriptures to work and hope for the transformation of society as a whole, [they] were active in promoting such institutions as orphanages and hospitals and in such enterprises as nursing the sick and relieving famine.³⁸

The Enlightenment, Deism, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution brought a mixture of consequences to the American scene. On the one hand, they brought a new emphasis on the elimination of social ills. The Enlightenment doctrine of boundless progress by a person who was capable of changing the environment helped to erode the inevitability of want and misery in deterministic Calvinism. Most citizens recognized that the success of the new democratic republic rested in the hands of an electorate who could cast their votes freely and rationally, without the shackles of poverty, illiteracy, or other distress. Many private groups arose to meet the need.³⁹

On the other hand, these same influences which led to social reform also slowly changed the attitude of generosity to the poor towards a feeling of distrust and antagonism to dependents. By removing poverty from an assumed place in the social order, the Enlightenment fostered an opinion that the poor were personally responsible for their condition. The American Revolution furthered this notion that everyone could be released from poverty through hard work. Until the Great Revival of 1797-1805, when the churches gained back most of the ground they had lost, the horrors of the wars in America and France, the secular rationalism of Enlightenment thought, and the unorthodox beliefs of the Deists led to a decline in the general

³⁸Latourette, II, 1019.

³⁹Trattner, "Private Charity," 26.

morality of the country, a decline in church vigor, and a decline in the advances made in aid to the poor.⁴⁰

The passage of the First Amendment to the Constitution and the subsequent acceptance of the doctrine of separation of church and state had a profound impact on all of American life. The establishment clause of the First Amendment requires the government to regard religion neutrally, in order that interaction between the two might not result in a weakening of both or a dependency of one upon the other. The free exercise clause guarantees the churches the right to operate without governmental regulation of beliefs or actions, with certain narrowly defined exceptions. Similar clauses were eventually included in all of the state constitutions. These clauses are the result of an attitude which permeated most of early American society, an attitude which was equally hostile to authoritarianism by both church and state.

The separation of church and state creates problems, however, when both set up independent establishments. Not only do they both require total allegiance from the same people, but they both compete in the same market of services. In America, education and welfare programs are the prime examples of this competition. The early American scene found the churches powerful enough to retain control in both of these fields; the government did not dare step into the established and traditional role of the churches. Only the severe social upheavals which are the subject of this study were strong enough

⁴⁰Ibid.

to reverse this trend.⁴¹

It is rather difficult to establish when the effects of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization began to be felt on the American religious/social welfare scene, or even on American life in general. Certainly all three had been factors in society since shortly after America's earliest colonization. However, as immigration drastically increased about 1830, these three influences became inherently tied up with each other, the first being the main cause of the second and greatly aiding the last. The church in this period was thus faced with incredible new tasks in social welfare. While the problems arose in the first half of the nineteenth century, the churches' response was not felt effectively until the second half.

The most important impact of immigration on social welfare in America was the addition of large numbers of poverty-stricken individuals to the population. Practically all of the immigrants arriving in America at the peak of the immigrations in 1840-1860 were from Ireland and Germany. The Irish were overwhelmingly poor, coming from the little educated rural laboring population made desperate by the potato famine. Many arrived in need of immediate employment or emergency financial aid.⁴²

The German immigrants were largely political refugees, intellectuals and skilled artisans who moved into the cities to pursue industrial and commercial trades. This contributed to the closely

⁴¹Robert T. Miller and Ronald B. Flowers, Toward Benevolent Neutrality (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1977) 4, 9, 304.

⁴²June Axinn and Herman Levin, Social Welfare (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975) 26-27.

related problem of urban drift. Indeed, the cities were becoming the focus of an increasingly severe crisis for welfare. Not only were the German immigrants congregating there in search of employment, but also the Irish immigrants (who had landed in America almost entirely in the area between Boston and Baltimore) were stranded there because of their poverty. Furthermore, the native American population was also shifting towards the cities, particularly after the next influence, industrialization, got fully under way.

The influx of a large labor supply which was willing to work for low wages, combined with the vast natural resources in the land and the development of new forms of power and labor-saving machinery created the American Industrial Revolution. With it came "factories, trade unions, strikes, . . . protective tariffs, industrial centralization in towns, and other factors that were to cause many readjustment difficulties."⁴³

The effects of the large-scale immigrations of the first half of the nineteenth century, along with urbanization and industrialization, had profound effects on the churches and their role in social welfare.

They were to influence the Churches and church membership by taking hundreds of thousands of people away from their old rural homes with their associations and traditions, and placing them in new surroundings where conditions of urban life were strange and full both of moral pitfalls and of opportunities for improvement; by limiting their close contacts mainly to other industrial workers in place of the broader community life; by tending to throw them into unions and other associations of workers representing a different loyalty from that of the village and its life; by increasing the relative significance of the school and lyceum, and decreasing that of the well-established

⁴³ Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950) I, 695.

home and church; by enlarging the gap between employer and employee and tending to make it a matter of inheritance; by taking women out of their restricted home and church absorption; by substituting mechanic's libraries for church libraries; by making the politicians and the newspaper editor, rather than the local minister, the chief molders of public opinion; by substituting impersonal factory economy for home economy and unity; by opening the minds of men to all sorts of new economic and social theories that would disturb inherited traditions before people became adjusted to them; by the increase of workers dependent upon wages rather than on a self-sufficient family economy; and so on almost ad infinitum.⁴⁴

The churches were not well prepared to meet the new urban crisis because of the general public attitude toward the poor. The swelling ranks of the poor received an increasingly hostile welcome from the common people as taxes and welfare rolls increased. The prevailing view in the church, as well as in most of the rest of American society, was that "no man who is temperate, frugal, and willing to work need suffer or become a pauper."⁴⁵ Public relief was openly attacked on the basis that it removed the fear of economic need from people's minds and replaced it with reliance on the public dole. Public assistance was believed to destroy the incentive to work and caused the poor to remain idle. The great mass of people believed that by relying on private charity, the poor could in no way interpret aid as a right to be had by all. It was precarious and uncertain. Furthermore, private or sectarian welfare would not be susceptible to political pressures to increase aid; it would be best adapted to giving the poor the moral influence they needed to learn how to pull themselves out of poverty; and it would be an effective means of social control by tying the destitute to the well-to-do.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Ibid. ⁴⁵Trattner, "Private Charity," 26.

⁴⁶Ibid., 26-27.

The system of public aid was not so easily defeated, however. In the first place, it was deeply ingrained in the sociopolitical system as a sign of a liberal, humane policy. It was up to the citizens to see to it that it was administered fairly and sparingly. To this end, almshouses and workhouses were emphasized. Secondly, because of the attitudinal problem, it took several decades for the churches to respond adequately to the needs of the new urban poor; the common laborers began to thus feel alienated and increasingly turned to their union labor organizations as the means for aid. The unions were often openly hostile to the churches. Workers turned to public agitation and the state for economic protection. And yet this protection did not entail relief; relief continued to be limited in the public sphere to the "worthy poor." These were the disabled or those who for other reasons could not support themselves, as well as various other indigents whom the public felt should be institutionalized. Relief for the laborer affected by low wages and the impoverishing conditions of the early industrial society was relegated to church and private charities, who themselves were afflicted by the same opinion of the poor as the general public. They, too, preferred aid based on verbal extrapolation of the virtues of piety and work rather than material goods. With a slight respite during the Civil War, when, in the face of the enormous problems of relief entailed in any war, American generosity greatly increased, this attitude continued to result in a division of labor between the public role—which was that of caretaker of the almshouses, asylums, and other institutions—and the sectarian/private role—which was that of distributing limited "benefits without fostering pauperism, and

spreading those religious and moral influences which would produce the desired changes in the attitudes and behavior of the poor."⁴⁷ By the time the churches were ready to work for social causes under the movement commonly labeled the Social Gospel, a serious breach had developed between the poor industrial laborers and the church organizations.⁴⁸

The Social Gospel Movement was far more realistic in assessing the depths of the evils of industrial society. The Civil War, along with its enhancement of urbanization and industrialization and the renewed immigrations (now primarily from Eastern Europe) brought poverty and dependency to new heights. This, coupled with three prolonged depressions late in the nineteenth century (1873-1878, 1882-1886, and 1893-1897) "gave the early social gospelers their conviction that social systems must be harnessed to man's welfare."⁴⁹ The moral idealism of the new liberal theology, and its insistence on the practical results of religion, intensified the sense of Christian responsibility for doing something about the evils of society. Liberalism's optimism about human virtue and its conception about the immanence of God in the evolutionary process of history were bulwarks of the faith that the transformation of society was possible. The Social Gospel marked a definite recognition of the churches' duty to work for the creation of a just social order requiring more than stewardship, philanthropy, and the regulation of abuses. In this it expressed the primary difference between the new social concern

⁴⁷Ibid., 28. ⁴⁸Ibid., 27.

⁴⁹William A. Clebsch, From Sacred to Profane America (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 21.

that the well-being of humanity required the transformation of the social environment and the older humanitarianism that emphasized the changing of individuals.⁵⁰

The Social Gospel was characterized by a two-fold emphasis on a broader conception of the church's function, and a critique of the patterns and ideology of the social order. The Social Gospelers understood the crux of industrial maladjustment to be found in the conflict between capital and labor. They showed that unrestricted competition was leading directly to the most inhuman treatment of the poor, and in the arrogant denial of Christian ethics and human dignity. They insisted that the relations of capital and labor constituted a moral issue. Thus, Washington Gladden (often called the "father of the Social Gospel") wrote in 1876:

Now that slavery is out of the way, the questions that concern our free laborers are coming forward; and no intelligent man needs to be admonished on their urgency. They are not only questions of economy, they are in a large sense moral questions; nay, they touch the very marrow of that religion of good-will of which Christ was the founder. It is plain that the pulpit must have something to say about them.⁵¹

Such a view required an enlarged conception of the church's role in society. It must speak not only of honesty in the accumulation of wealth, and generosity once it is acquired, but it must also speak of justice to those who labor in the production of wealth. The church must be concerned with patterns of economic enterprise. So wrote Josiah Strong:

⁵⁰John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) 242-243.

⁵¹Cited in *ibid.*, 245-246.

The world in this sociological age needs a new social ideal to direct the progress of civilization. Let the church fully accept her mission and she will furnish this needed ideal, viz., her Master's conception of the Kingdom of God come upon earth.⁵²

The church is to be the source of self-giving love to replace selfish competition, assuming an active role in the establishment of social justice and Christian ethics in every aspect of life. The movement turned the churches away from the tendency to practice evangelization and conversion of the poor and oppressed, and "sought to inspire Christians to strive to bring all society as well as the individual into conformity with the teachings of Jesus."⁵³ Through such men as Washington Gladden, Charles Loring Brace, Richard T. Ely, Lyman Abbott, Josiah Strong, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Charles M. Sheldon economic, social, and political institutions came increasingly under the critical eye of the church and the citizenry. Attempts were made for the first time to alleviate poverty and oppression throughout all of society by changing social structures. The late nineteenth century saw many moderate and liberal churches moving quickly toward becoming effective agencies in meeting social needs. Churches, church-related welfare institutions, and private agencies expanded the relief available to meet every kind of crisis and need.⁵⁴

The very dearth of relief agencies created a problem of its own. By the time of the deep depressions of the late nineteenth century, material relief naturally took precedence over spiritual guidance. Furthermore, "little attention was paid to any investigation

⁵²Ibid., 246. ⁵³Latourette, II, 1263.

⁵⁴Dillenger and Welch, 246.

of need, to safeguards against duplicity, or to the provision of counsel"⁵⁵ as soup kitchens, bread-lines, food, fuel, clothing, and even cash distribution centers were set up. A reaction to this chaos set in, emphasizing that charity should be efficient and not demoralizing to the recipients. Thus the charity organization movement was spawned, led to a large degree by ministers and leaders of the Social Gospel movement. Begun in Buffalo, New York, in 1877, the objectives of the charity organizations were:

(1) to eliminate fraud, inefficiency, and duplicity in the area by setting up organizations to serve as clearing houses for all relief-dispensing societies in the community, by promoting cooperation and higher standards of efficiency among them, by maintaining registries of all relief applicants and keeping detailed records of the assistance they received, and so on;

(2) to devise a constructive method of dealing with or treating poverty by having "friendly visitors" investigate each case in order to diagnose the cause of destitution and then prescribe the remedy, usually a heavy dose of moral exhortation.⁵⁶

Christian philanthropy for the "worthy" poor remained high throughout the century. Hundreds of hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged were constructed and maintained under church auspices. Christians pioneered in specialized care for the blind, deaf, and physically handicapped. Christian motives were behind most of the voluntary gifts given by the wealthy—and the poor—which totalled hundreds of dollars annually by the end of the century.⁵⁷

In the first half of the century Arthur and Lewis Tappan, devout Christians, were well known for their generosity. Through more than a century members of the Dodge family, avowed Christians, were devoted in giving both time and money. John Davison Rockefeller (1839-1937), a Baptist layman who accumulated the nucleus of his vast fortune through pioneering in developing and

⁵⁵Trattner, "Private Charity," 28. ⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Latourette, II, 1270.

marketing the petroleum resources of the country, sought counsel in the initial stages of his philanthropies from friends among the Baptist clergy, and largely channelled his enormous giving through⁵⁸ organizations which he either chose or set up on their advice.

Even though the work of the Social Gospelers included wider aims and proposals, it continued to emphasize that this work could (and should) be done by the churches. Welfare at the end of the nineteenth century remained almost entirely a private affair administered by churches, church-related institutions, and private agencies guided by a series of preconceived notions about the nature of poverty and dependence. Public relief was limited to the institutionalization of the permanently disabled or undesirables and a few meager attempts at public works projects at the heights of the depressions. Slowly, state boards of charities were formed to take the responsibility for these institutions away from the often inept and corrupt municipal governments.⁵⁹

Although the widest Social Gospel ideals were not immediately accepted, the reforms that were instituted paved the way for the actualization of their visions in the New Deal, Fair Deal, and New Frontier programs. In the public sphere, large centralized poorhouses filled with all types of dependents were gradually replaced by specialized public institutions for the deaf, blind, mentally and physically handicapped, and juveniles where special needs could be met with special care. The Social Gospel's popularization of social work aided the emerging groups of professional public social service workers.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Latourette, II, 1270-1271.

⁵⁹Trattner, "Private Charity," 40. ⁶⁰Mohl, 10.

In the private sphere, the detailed data kept by the organized charities was found to deny traditional assumptions about the causes of, and the characteristics of those in, poverty. The agents found that poverty was much more often caused by social factors beyond the control of the individual than by character flaws. Attitudes slowly began to change.⁶¹

The period 1900-1920 saw a tremendous spread of the new attitudes towards poverty and social welfare. Of increasing concern were the numerous instances when families were stricken by poverty because of permanently injurious or killing industrial accidents; the removal of children from fatherless homes when the mother could not adequately provide; and the uncertainties of industrial employment in times of depression.⁶² Church leaders and social progressives advanced the idea that poverty stemmed from economic forces over which the individual had no control--and therefore for which he or she should not be held responsible. Social reform was a more urgent task than the elevation of personal morality. While the reformers believed that poverty originated in adverse social structures, they also believed that the social system was capable of being corrected. The work of the social reformers of this period was to arouse the public and acquaint them with enthusiasm for social betterment.

[Jacob Hollander, former professor of political science at John Hopkins University] claimed that "the misdirections, not the normal workings" of twentieth century industrialism left a portion of the community in receipt of less than enough to maintain itself in decency. "Now, in our day," he asserted, "the conquest

⁶¹Trattner, "Private Charity," 40.

⁶²Muriel W. and Ralph E. Pumphrey, "Private Charity in the Twentieth Century," Current History 65 (July 1973) 29.

of poverty looms up as an economic possibility, definitely within our reach--if only society desire it sufficiently and will pay enough to achieve it."⁶³

In order to more effectively express their ideals on a continuing basis, the churches and other socially concerned private groups—who had traditionally been confined to local programs and influence—in the early twentieth century joined coalitions and associations of like mindedness to form national organizations. In the churches, this movement was represented by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, founded in 1908. Through such organizations as the Council, awareness of the social causes of poverty was enhanced and experimental programs begun.⁶⁴ Indeed, much of the social work

⁶³Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths (New York: New York University Press, 1956) 136.

⁶⁴For example, the "Social Creed of the Churches" of the Federal Council (1908) stated:

We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the churches must stand--

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.

For the right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safeguarded against encroachments of every kind.

For the right of workers to some protection against the hardships often resulting from the swift crises of industrial change.

For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.

For the protection of the workers from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries and mortality.

For the abolition of child labor.

For such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

For the suppression of the "sweating system."

For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.

For a release from employment one day in seven.

For a living wage as a minimum in every industry and for the highest wage that each industry can afford.

that was done at the turn of the century was begun by deeply religious people expressing their concern on a community level. Conversely, many of those who were active in social work were also prominent in the early efforts to make the Federal Council of Churches a success.⁶⁵

As order increased, progressive reformers—frequently led by those in the church—advocated tenement house reform, industrial safety legislation, improvements in education, public health regulation, legislation defining minimum wages and maximum hours, the elimination of child labor, workmen's compensation, health insurance, unemployment insurance, mother's pension, old age insurance, and other programs designed to eliminate social and economic injustices. Still, influence remained largely local, or at best limited to the states. Welfare was still largely a private or sectarian responsibility.⁶⁶

The social optimism of the 1920's brought a rapid decline in public interest in welfare reform. The apparent prosperity of the period produced a feeling that the poverty problem had been defeated. It had not. Social workers and private welfare agencies continued to compile statistics of a growing poverty problem, the facts of which supported the new theories of poverty and welfare. Indeed, many of their statistics heralded the coming Great Depression.⁶⁷ So, with moderate advances, welfare programs in the United States continued in structure, financing, and administration much as they had been throughout the nineteenth cen-

For the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.

For suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.

For the abatement of poverty.

⁶⁵ Miller, 85. ⁶⁶ Mohl, 38. ⁶⁷ Pumphrey, 29.

tury, and essentially as they had been framed by the Elizabethan Poor Laws until the 1930's.

The Great Depression, of course, created massive, unprecedented, and unpredicted unemployment, and threw public, private, and church-related welfare agencies into chaos. Guided by the antiquated yet persistent nineteenth century ideas of rugged individualism regarding poverty and relief, President Herbert Hoover delayed the speedy response to the Depression by refusing to consider federal employment relief. He insisted that the crisis could be handled by local governmental agencies, along with private philanthropy and church charities. However, the inadequacy of local revenues became quickly manifest as city after city went bankrupt, church funds were exhausted, and private coffers went dry. At this point the states attempted to take up the burden of poor relief, but, by the end of the Hoover presidency, as unemployment grew and the Depression deepened, even these state funds proved inadequate.⁶⁸

The inability of the local governments, private philanthropies, and church welfare agencies to carry the burden during the Depression forced the nation to look to drastic new measures for economic security. Church leaders and others involved in social welfare pled for federal intervention. In an overwhelming rejection of conservative political philosophies, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the progressive New York governor who had led the way in state welfare reforms, was elected to the presidency. Breaking with the Hoover administration's policies that the localities could manage the crisis on their own, Roosevelt launched

⁶⁸ Mohl, 38.

his New Deal, a multi-pronged attack against unemployment. Acronyms such as CCC, FERA, PWA, CWA, WPA, etc., became household words. Relying on state, local, and private agencies to administer and match funds, the federal government began to take responsibility for the general welfare of its citizens. Having appropriated its first expenditure for a welfare purpose in 1921--\$1,000,000 for the health of mothers and infants under the Sheppard-Towner Act--just more than a decade later the WPA alone had an annual expenditure of \$10 billion. The national government's welfare role undeniably changed as workers of every kind were employed.⁶⁹

Nearly three-quarters of those who set out as dawn broke headed for blue collar jobs--constructing and repairing hospitals (2,550 by the time of the program's termination in 1943), installing sewers and water mains (eventually 50,388 miles were laid), improving old parks and clearing the way for new ones (a total of 542,361 acres were touched by government crews), building new roads and repaving old ones (a staggering 651,087 miles in all).

Meanwhile, the rest of the WPA task force, the service workers, engaged in an extraordinary range of activities. Music teachers in Oklahoma gave lessons to their pupils, young and old (ultimately 200,000 received instruction in a state with a population of only 2,000,000), while WPA orchestras, baroque ensembles and choral groups brought classical music to millions who had never before heard a live performance. In large cities, WPA opera employed not only musicians: jobless artists were also hired as painters, federal actors as spear carriers, writers as publicity agents. Historians intent on inventorying the nation's heritage foraged in attics and basements, while WPA puppeteers performed Punch 'n Judy for thousands of children. Young people employed by the National Youth Administration, an adjunct of WPA, headed for schools where they monitored exams, graded papers, and washed test tubes. Jobless engineers went to their drawing boards to plan additional projects; WPA dentists and doctors ministered to their co-workers; athletes manned recreation projects; WPA teachers staffed classrooms for nursery schoolers and the elderly alike; vaudeville troupes soft-shoed before audiences at CCC camps; an all-Negro cast performed Macbeth (setting the play not in Scotland but in the Caribbean); and WPA

⁶⁹Charles H. Trout, "Welfare in the New Deal Era," Current History 65 (July 1973) 14, 39.

braille experts cared for the blind.⁷⁰

When the crisis was over some ten years later—ended only by the greater crisis of World War II--the new pyramid of inter-governmental relationships with Washington now at the apex had not solved all of the country's poverty and welfare problems. In entering into a new social era, federal expenditures exceeded any previous peace-time project. Borrowing grew to a proportion that only war had justified before. Wealthy persons and corporations had to bear ever larger proportions of the burden. Although the unemployed were in a better position than they had been in any previous period of economic depression, church welfare workers and public social workers saw that a tremendous need still existed. For every person on the federal payroll, four had been denied relief. While the 1935 Social Security Act helped many people meet life crises more adequately, for the most part New Deal measures were not designed for dependents such as children, the elderly, and the under-educated. The most serious problem remained attitudinal, particularly among the general public. While professionals and scholars saw the environmental causes of destitution, the common person frequently saw individual shortcomings such as laziness, sexual excesses, and the misuse of public monies. The problem was aggravated by a large-scale migration of blacks from the South to urban centers. When jobs were unavailable, relief rolls swelled—and the traditional hostility to the unemployable during periods of labor scarcity became coupled with simple racism.⁷¹

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Neil Betten, "American Attitudes Toward the Poor: A Historical Overview," Current History 65 (July 1973) 5.

Incomplete though the New Deal programs were, they registered a striking advance over the inhumane, archaic, and unsystematic methods of treating distress before the Depression. *The Depression was indeed the social factor which permanently altered social welfare practice in the United States, the result of which "marked a decisive transfer of welfare functions from voluntary to public institutions, and from the local to the federal level, thus paving the way for contemporary anti-poverty programs."*⁷² By 1941 the United States had a start toward a social insurance system designed to protect workers against the hazards of age and unemployment. Federal funds had encouraged states to supplement national programs with legislation of their own. There was growing federal-state cooperation for the services to the blind, aged, and dependent children. Organized labor was growing and helping improve the conditions of many workers.

The expansion of the federal government into the financing of relief took some of the pressure off philanthropy and church charities. No one any longer pretended that these sources could meet the need or do anything more than play a supplemental role in the alleviation of distress, although throughout the 1930's there remained ample need for private and sectarian services to the millions of families on relief and the other millions who, although hardpressed, were not yet on relief. Nonetheless, charitable giving turned increasingly to more congenial occupations: "pioneering," development of experimental programs, promotion of research, enrichment of cultural life, and im-

⁷²Roy Lubove, The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 179, quoted in Mohl, 39.

provement of techniques of helpfulness applicable to individuals and families at any income level.⁷³

Following the New Deal era, concern about poverty in America dwindled to a standstill. During World War II, unemployment fell to 1.2 percent, the lowest level since 1906. In fear of massive unemployment when the armed forces returned, various measures were passed as the war drew to a close that promised a job and decent housing for every veteran. Low-interest loans and the National Housing Act (1949) worked on the housing problems and the 1945 G.I. Bill of Rights, together with 1946 Full Employment Act, made at least a paper promise of a job for all who were able and willing to work.⁷⁴ But these acts had little effect on those dependent on welfare for survival. When the post-war recession failed to materialize, the belief in widespread prosperity brought a neglect of social reform and the poverty-stricken. Throughout the 1950's the theme that prosperity had triumphed and poverty and insecurity no longer existed affected virtually every aspect of American life.⁷⁵

As the 1960's began, opportunity was ripe for another revolution in social welfare. The poor had been suffering for two decades without notice, being hidden in isolated pockets of Appalachia, Harlem, rural areas, and urban ghettos. The poor were comprised of the least articulate of the populace who were thus least able to make their plight

⁷³Robert H. Bremner, American Philanthropy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 154-155.

⁷⁴Winifred Bell, "Federal Social Welfare Programs: 1945-1968," Current History 65 (July 1973) 17.

⁷⁵Trattner, From Poor Law, 246-247.

known or their power felt. But their story slowly began to be told by an army of concerned individuals who had remained in contact with the poor through the 1940's and 1950's. It included pastors in the city slums of the great northern metropolitan centers where the impoverished were left behind unnoticed while the middle and upper classes rushed to the suburbs; it included ministers in small rural churches and those who followed the migratory farm workers during the harvest season. There were teachers and educators in the impoverished high schools and colleges of the South, as well as sponsors and directors in church-related orphanages and children's homes--and the lay volunteers who staffed them. Sociologists and social workers in the settlements and clerics in inner-city missions wrote prolifically. Indeed, the churches awoke from a lethargic three decades of complacency:

During the past thirty-five years the Democratic Party and not the churches in America has taken the initiative in developing and securing the adoption of new legislation intended to help the poor. The labor unions have done more than the churches in directing public attention to the economic problems of the poor and in relieving the severity of these problems for millions of American families. Social workers and other members of secular helping professions have been more effective than the clergy in securing the adoption of new enlightened public policies and attitudes at the state and local levels of government. During the three decades from 1933-1963, the contributions of the churches were greatly overshadowed by the efforts of secular agencies in the nation's continuing effort to reduce the severity of the problems created by poverty.⁷⁶

The efforts of these people brought the consciousness of poverty again to the fore of the American public. The campaign of President John F. Kennedy conveyed a sense of urgency about the long-neglected social problems. In his inaugural address, Kennedy asked the nation

⁷⁶Lyle E. Schaller, The Churches' War on Poverty (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967) 27-28.

to "bear the burden of a long twilight struggle against the common enemies of men: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war."⁷⁷ The civil rights movement organized and made the nation further aware of the poor. The relationships between civil rights or the lack of them--injustices in social structures--and poverty became painfully clear. And then, as if to highlight what others were saying, the poor themselves were heard as America's cities exploded. Hundreds of cities around the nation were affected by outbreaks which--although originating in various immediate factors--could all be traced to long suffering poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and the frustrations of economic exploitation.

In response to this rediscovery of the poor, the late 1960's was a flurry of legislative activity in social welfare. The Office of Economic Opportunity was created and various work and study programs began to operate: Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA); the Job Corps for school dropouts; Upward Bound for slum children eligible for college; the Neighborhood Youth Corps for jobless teenagers; Operation Head Start for preschoolers; low interest loans and grants to poverty-stricken rural families and migrant workers; and others. The Manpower Development and Training Act prepared workers to more easily enter the job market. Health care was aided by 1965 legislation that created Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the needy. Food stamps aided poor families plagued by malnutrition.⁷⁸

This renewed interest was also felt in the churches. During the mid-1960's large quantities of money and workers were systematically recruited by socially progressive churches for their war on poverty

⁷⁷Quoted in Trattner, From Poor Law, 253.

⁷⁸Ibid., 255-256.

in an unprecedentedly large-scale effort. Cooperation was also without precedent in American church history as interfaith, interdenominational, and inter-church alliances were formed to combat the common problem. However, in spite of the significant efforts of those churches, the federal government continued to play an increasingly important role in welfare activity. Many churches--particularly those holding conservative or moderate theologies and policies of social action--did not join the war on poverty for a variety of reasons. Church participation in the social welfare fields appeared to be dying out.

The government attempted to encourage church participation and to aid church and private programs by increased subsidies. In addition to the traditional practice of tax exemption, the government extended its "purchase of service" agreements in which public agencies purchase specialized services from private (including sectarian) agencies to include hospitals, homes for the elderly, children's agencies, and others. The Grant-in-Aid Program and federal subsidies such as the Hill-Burton Hospital Survey and Construction Act provided billions of dollars for welfare services. Liberal government loans were also utilized. In contrast to earlier times when the churches took the initiative in social welfare in response to an inner call, the mobilization of the churches in the 1960's was largely a response to an external call from society in general and the federal government in particular. The church was no longer considered a major influence in American welfare.⁷⁹

During the 1970's the welfare reforms again disappeared. Two

⁷⁹Schaller, 29-30.

dramatic developments, however, changed the face of American poverty and welfare between the mid-1960's and the early 1970's: a fantastic drop in the number of poor and a stunning enlargement of social welfare programs, especially Social Security. The growth in all social welfare programs was staggering. Expenditures rose between 1965 and 1976 at an annual rate of 7.2 percent in constant dollars, compared to 4.6 percent annually between 1950 and 1965. In 1960 such spending was 7.7 percent of the GNP; in 1965, 10.5 percent; in 1974, 16 percent. Public assistance payments per recipient increased both in constant dollars and in comparison to average wage rates.⁸⁰

This growth of social welfare expenditures, broadly defined, was effective in reducing poverty in the United States. Experts who attempted to isolate the impact of social welfare laws distinguished between the "pretransfer" poor (the number left in poverty by the market) and the "posttransfer" poor (those who remained poor after social insurance, public assistance, and in-kind benefits were added to incomes). The impact of such programs was considerable in the mid-1960's and grew dramatically in the next ten years. Cash payments alone pulled about 33 percent of the pretransfer poor, or 5.1 million households, out of poverty in 1965. By 1972 the number of households was 7.7 million, or 44 percent. If the impact of in-kind benefits is added, 60 percent or more of the pre-transfer poor were removed from poverty. The decisive role of social welfare in reducing poverty is clear from a look at pre- and post-transfer poverty in 1974. Without any public programs, 20.2 million American families, more than one-quarter of the

⁸⁰James T. Patterson, America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1980 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 157.

total population, would have been poor. With social insurance and public aid added to their incomes, 9.1 million remained poor. Adding Medicaid, food stamps, and the other in-kind benefits, the number fell to 5.4 million, or 6.9 percent of all families.⁸¹

The far-ranging contribution of the federal government to the reduction of poverty has been ignored by the Reagan Administration and those who support its policies of decreasing federal support for public assistance in favor of "trickle down" aid from a strong economy. Even the above-average economic growth of the years between 1965 and 1972 had only a marginal impact on the poor. With government programs excluded, poverty during this period dropped from 21.3 percent to 19.2 percent. "Whereas economic growth reduced the poverty of one in ten Americans, governmental intervention reduced that of more than one in two Americans over the same period, a rate five to six times greater than that of the private economy."⁸² While economic growth did sharply reduce poverty among the strongest and most competitive economic groups, particularly white and non-white families headed by males under age 65 (where poverty declined by one-third or more), economic expansion made little or no difference to the poverty rates of many other groups, particularly the large groups of the elderly, white and minority women, and the young people of the economically weak groups. Schwarz says:

The government's programs were vital in fighting poverty precisely because the private sector was itself incapable of making more than a marginal dent in poverty among the many millions of Americans who remained trapped within the weaker economic groups.

⁸¹Ibid., 165.

⁸²John E. Schwarz, America's Hidden Success (New York: Norton, 1983) 38-39.

either too old to get work or channeled into dead-end jobs that often paid little more than half-time wages for full-time work. Including their dependents, more than 30 million Americans lived in such families.⁸³

In addition to simply reducing the rate of poverty, federal programs have been effective in raising the quality of life for the poor, especially with respect to essential human needs. Malnutrition has been sharply reduced by the food stamp program. Medical care for the poor and elderly has been made more accessible: Between 1963 and 1970, the percentage of people living in poverty who had never visited a physician dropped from 19 percent to 8 percent. Likewise, housing for the poor has improved, with significantly fewer living in overcrowded or substandard facilities.⁸⁴

Government programs designed to break the poverty cycle and prevent the return to poverty by creating jobs or job training have also been deemed successful. A seven-year study by John Hopkins University of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) program discovered that the employment of CETA participants jumped significantly following participation in the CETA program and that it continued to improve over the long term. The record of the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) was even better. The Head Start program, begun to provide superior early education for low-income children to prepare them for the school environment and subsequent employment without need for further training, was found to produce children who were about 45 percent less likely to be held back a grade, who had more favorable perceptions about their schoolwork when in high school, and who were

⁸³Ibid., 39.

⁸⁴Ibid., 44-50.

more likely to want to pursue higher education at a college or university.⁸⁵

The trend of the 1980's is toward sharp reductions in public assistance programs. The Reagan Administration has made more significant budget cuts to a wider range of welfare programs since it took office in January, 1981 than any other administration since the Great Depression. Surprisingly, however, the "social safety net" began having trouble as far back as the economic recession of 1974-1975. The inflation caused by the economic troubles plaguing the nation in this period, coming on the heels of the oil crisis of October, 1973, was quickly reflected in public welfare programs for the poor; the inflation problem has continued to batter these programs in the years since. While the total expenditures for welfare programs grew to new heights in this period, inflation negated the increase until the real benefits from both Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the food stamp program experienced sharp reductions. The nationwide average for AFDC benefits fell by 24 percent between 1974 and 1981. With the food stamp program taken into consideration—most AFDC recipients also receive food stamps—benefits fell 18 percent in real terms over the same period. Medicaid, the third leg of the safety net triad formed by AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid, experienced limitations both in eligibility standards and in the range of services offered prior to 1981. Thus, when the Reagan administration came to office, the attack against key welfare programs was already under way.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ibid., 53-56.

⁸⁶Barry Friedman and Leonard Hausman, "The Social Welfare Net?: Private vs. Public Welfare," USA TODAY 111 (September 1982) 41-42.

The only major reform of social welfare programs during this period came in October, 1972, when Congress approved passage of the Supplemental Security Income program. SSI, as it was known, established an income floor under benefits paid to the less controversial adult categories of public assistance--the aged, blind, and disabled. While this new program represented a shift from traditional welfare programs designed to open doors to move the poor off the welfare rolls to a program establishing a national floor under income, the concept was never pursued beyond the most obviously needy. A guaranteed minimum income for all was much talked about, but never came close to reality.

When their constituencies began to feel the effects of the recession with a drop in real income in 1974, legislators came under increasing pressure not to adjust AFDC benefits for inflation in any significant way. The Department of Health and Human Services reported that as a result, the national average for welfare benefits dropped 29.4 percent by 1981, after adjustment for inflation. Real AFDC benefits dropped by 36 percent in Michigan, and in Texas, where benefits were relatively low to begin with, the decline was 45 percent.⁸⁷

However, the real decline in AFDC benefits was somewhat offset by the adjustments in food stamps, because food stamps are indexed for inflation. Food stamps, as part of a package that includes and depends on AFDC, can rise when AFDC benefits fall; furthermore, food stamp benefits can rise with inflation. As a result, the combination of AFDC and food stamp benefits fell in no state by more than 30 percent: but the combined benefits fell in real terms by over 20 percent

⁸⁷"Inflation Reduces Welfare Benefits' Buying Power 29%," Washington Post (June 23, 1982) 41-42.

in more than 40 percent of the states before President Reagan took office.⁸⁸

While it is helpful to analyze the effects of inflation on welfare programs by looking at the combined benefits, doing so hides a significant problem created by increasing reliance on food stamps as a percentage of a total benefit package. Since food stamps may only be used to purchase food, the family whose benefit package is made up of a high percentage of food stamps may be forced to substitute purchases of food for other items of which they may have greater need, such as clothing or shelter. Furthermore, if such families are forced to sell some of their stamps at a substantial discount in order to raise cash for these preferred purchases, the total value of their benefits declines. This lessens the offset provided by rising food stamp benefits for falling AFDC benefits.

While inflation triggered a substantial decrease in the real value of AFDC and food stamp benefits, similar problems were occurring with Medicaid. First, because eligibility for Medicaid is based on income, the inflation that eroded AFDC benefits also eroded Medicaid eligibility standards. Very simply, since one had to be relatively poorer to receive AFDC benefits, one had to be poorer to establish eligibility for Medicaid as well. As a result, most of the 2 million-person decline in the Medicaid roles between 1976 and 1979 was among AFDC recipients. Second, many states also reduced the types of medical services covered by Medicaid as well as the depth of coverage for particular services.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Friedman and Hausman 42. ⁸⁹Ibid.

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, these trends in the reduction of real benefits to the poor increased and quickened dramatically. Social programs bore half of Reagan's \$35 billion reduction in the federal budget for fiscal 1982. The loss of jobs, training programs and cash benefits for the able-bodied meant that the cuts affected most adversely those workers with modest incomes. Among the cuts that hit the regularly employed were the reductions in AFDC and food stamps, and the elimination of CETA public service jobs. Many with low-paying jobs are finding that, because of the cutbacks, their income is lower than if they were unemployed and received full welfare benefits. Questions have been raised regarding the disincentive to work caused by the cutbacks.⁹⁰

The cuts in federal funds, as well as their own fiscal problems, have caused the state governments to begin reducing human service programs other than AFDC and food stamps. The most often affected are those groups who are new recipients of welfare or who are relatively weak, such as the handicapped.⁹¹

The total value of lost benefits to families are difficult to calculate and will vary from one family to another. Some benefits, like AFDC, are received directly by individuals, while others benefit an entire group and are applied indirectly, such as funds for a community center or a neighborhood restoration project.

At this point, it is not possible to render a simple summary of all income losses imposed by the whole set of budget cuts, Federal and state, already in effect. However, by way of illustration, a family of four with an \$8,600 annual income will lose annually some \$1,500 (\$500 in AFDC benefits and an average of \$1,000 from

⁹⁰Ibid. ⁹¹Ibid.

Medicaid). The family will suffer even larger losses if it receives other benefits. A teenager in the family, for example, is much less likely than before to get a CETA summer job. Beyond these, services received by this family by virtue of its being part of a neighborhood collection also are dwindling.⁹² The latter include public school education and police protection.

A report prepared by the Women's Research and Education Institute, supported by a Congressional Budget Office projection, has concluded that women and children will bear a disproportionate share of the budget cuts. According to the most recent figures, families headed by women were 11 percent of all U. S. households but they represented 70 percent of the families receiving public assistance. They represented 40 percent of all families receiving food stamps, living in public housing, and using subsidized school lunches. Women were two-thirds of all recipients of Supplemental Security Income for the aged, blind, and disabled poor.⁹³

It is interesting to note that broadly-based programs with wide political appeal have eluded major cuts in benefits and have also been indexed against inflation. Social insurance programs such as disability and Social Security are notable. These programs provide benefits to large numbers of the middle class as well as the poor.

In addition to the public welfare system, the voluntary non-profit sector represented largely by the churches is, of course, still a main provider of social welfare services. However, as we have noted, the growth of the public welfare system has increased the private sector's dependence on public funding. In fact, it is through this public

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³"Where Budget Cuts Will Hit Hardest," Los Angeles Times (August 14, 1983) VI-6.

funding that the federal government has become a major factor in the growth of the voluntary sector. Figures regarding the impact of the federal cutbacks on the private sector are not complete, but a study by the Urban Institute indicates that social welfare services in the private sector will lose about 50 percent of their public funds over the next few years (health service organizations stand to lose substantially less).⁹⁴

In response to the cries from advocates of these programs that the government is literally taking food from the mouths of babes, President Reagan has suggested that volunteers can and will be able to fill many of the personnel service gaps, and that the private sector is capable of voluntarily contributing funds to support programs to serve the "truly needy." And, indeed, giving to charities was up 12.3 percent in 1981 over 1980, but the gifts are still not enough to fill the gap created by federal budget-cutting.⁹⁵ To compensate through giving for the combined effects of the budget cuts and inflation would necessitate an increase in private giving by three- to four-fold the rate of the increases in such giving in recent years. Ironically, changes in tax law sponsored by the Reagan Administration are reducing incentives for charitable donations. For a person in the 70 percent tax bracket, a gift of \$100,000 to a voluntary hospital had cost \$30,000. Now, with the 70 percent rate lowered to 50 percent, the same gift will cost \$50,000. In fact, one Urban Institute study suggests that recent changes

⁹⁴Friedman and Hausman, 43.

⁹⁵"A Spurt In Voluntarism, But Is It Enough?" U. S. News & World Report 93 (September 20, 1982) 67.

in the tax laws will cost the voluntary sector \$20 billion in donations over the next several years.⁹⁶

The voluntary sector, including the church-related welfare institutions, will clearly be less capable in the next several years of providing health and welfare services to the needy. Services will have to be cut back, and millions of people may suffer.

⁹⁶Friedman and Hausman, 43.

Chapter 4

GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE ROLES OF THE CHURCHES AND THE STATE IN SOCIAL WELFARE

The previous chapter documented the historical events which changed social welfare programs from being essentially private and sectarian in nature to being largely in the public domain. Nevertheless, there remain many overlapping functions between church and state in social welfare. Churches own and operate hospitals and various welfare institutions such as day-care centers for children of poor families and homes for the elderly, and they also engage in various types of social welfare services such as the care, custody, and placement of children, as well as various anti-poverty, hunger, and shelter programs. Many of these programs and services are carried out in cooperation with the courts and governmental agencies, including the use of public funds. The use of government funds to establish and maintain church-related welfare enterprises precipitates important questions of church-state relations in a nation such as the United States, where the separation of church and state is a long-standing tradition.

LEGAL ISSUES

Government funding of sectarian welfare programs is not new. For over one hundred years there has existed in the United States a close partnership between the local governments and church welfare agencies. Litigation regarding state constitutional bans on public expenditures for private or sectarian welfare projects has been pursued for some time in the areas of hospitals, custodial institutions, and welfare

organizations. State court cases involving sectarian hospitals have concluded that where there is a specific constitutional ban on state aid to such institutions there is little justification for public expenditures of this kind. Where there is no such provision, however, this aid may be based on a number of possible rationales. Many courts have relied on the "conduit theory" in which the institution is regarded as a channel through which funds flow for the benefit of the citizens; these courts refused to look beyond the purpose and composition of the corporation controlling the hospital.¹ Custodial institutions have been the subject of very little case law, and so generalizations are difficult here. Few cases have been brought to court under constitutional bans on aid to this type of institution, and while they generally affirm the legality of such aid, they are inconsistent with similar cases in other areas.² Although decisions are divided in states where such bans are not to be found, in general it can be said that where aid can be shown to be going to individuals and not to an institution, many jurisdictions will allow it to be appropriated. Likewise, other church-related welfare organizations may expect court decisions on public aid to be based on the type of constitutional clause involved: broadly worded clauses allow more liberal interpretations in which courts tend to favor aid; narrowly written clauses leave the courts no alternative except to strike down public aid.³

Aside from state prohibitions, any federal or state expenditure

¹Chester James Antieau, Phillip Mark Carroll, and Thomas Carroll Burke, Religion Under the State Constitutions (Brooklyn: Central Book Company, 1965) 15.

²Ibid., 19-20. ³Ibid., 22.

to institutions under sectarian control is subject to the First Amendment's ban on laws respecting an establishment of religion. The classic legal precedent for this is the decision of the U. S. Supreme Court in Bradfield v. Roberts, 175 U.S. 299 (1899). In that case a taxpayer filed suit against the federal government to stop the payment of public monies to Providence Hospital, conducted by the Sisters of Charity of the Catholic Church. In question was a \$30,000 appropriation for the construction of two isolation wards for persons with contagious diseases, and the authorization of \$250 for each poor person treated at the hospital sent by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. The Court, in a unanimous opinion, sustained the validity of the contract on the ground that the corporation holding the hospital was secular and nonsectarian, an entity separate and distinct from its stockholders, who all happened to be Catholic Sisters of Charity. In effect, the Court ruled that a sectarian institution may enter into partnership with the state without violating the principle of separation of church and state, provided that the agency limits itself to its contractual obligations, viz., providing health care. "The state enters into a contract with the institution as a civil entity, not as a religious body. Therefore, the state may use sectarian institutions just as it may other legally incorporated institutions."⁴

As the state and federal governments became increasingly involved in welfare services in the 1930's and again in the 1960's, the Supreme Court has had many more opportunities to review the work of the government in welfare. The overall effect of the principles and

⁴Bernard J. Coughlin, Church and State in Social Welfare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) 45.

trends set forth by the Court in these decisions has permissively and affirmatively allowed greater authority to national and state governments in utilizing their powers to carry out welfare responsibilities. The Court has expressed increasing concern for the rights of those receiving welfare. Through its work, the Court has helped establish and maintain humanitarian principles in welfare as government programs have expanded.

The Court's pre-1920 attitude toward the poor in general reflected the attitude of society at large, that the poor represented a "moral pestilence" which should be dealt with at a local level.⁵ This attitude began to give way in the 1920's and 1930's, as the Depression eroded traditional concepts of poverty. A major step forward in the Court's attitude toward the poor was represented by the decision in Edwards v. The People of California, 314 U.S. 160 (1941). In the opinion delivered by Justice Byrnes, the Court finally ceased to equate poverty with immorality: "We do not think that it would now be seriously contended that because a person is without employment and without funds he constitutes a 'moral pestilence.' Poverty and immorality are not synonymous."⁶ In the Edwards case, the Court also found it necessary to address the English poor law concept of local responsibility for the public welfare:⁷

We do, however, suggest that the theory of the Elizabethan Poor Laws no longer fits the facts. Recent years, and particularly

⁵City of New York v. Miln, 36 U.S. 102 (1837), is typical.

⁶314 U.S. 176.

⁷Jan L. Hagen, "Whatever Happened to 43 Elizabeth I, C.2?" Social Service Review 56 (March 1982) 111-112.

the past decade, have been marked by a growing recognition that in an industrial society the task of providing assistance to the needy has ceased to be local in character. The duty to share the burden, if not wholly to assume it, has been recognized not only by the state governments, but by the federal government as well. . . . In not inconsiderable measure the relief of the needy has become the common responsibility and concern of the whole nation.

This acknowledgment came on the heels of other major decisions which had already hinted at the responsibility of the federal government for the general welfare. Part of the groundwork for this turn of events was the Court's decision in Massachusetts v. Mellon, 262 U.S. 447 (1923). In this case the constitutionality of the Maternity and Infancy Act was challenged. This act, aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality and at protecting maternal and infant health, was one of the first attempts at federal and state cooperation in social welfare. Because the states were given the option of participation, the challenge that state powers were being abridged was rejected by the Court. The decision implied that the alleviation of poverty was a permissible national objective, and opened the door for further federal government activity in the area of social welfare.⁹

Building on the cooperative system established by the Maternity and Infancy Act, the Social Security Act of 1935 broadened the scope and the funding of programs for these cooperative ventures. Steward Machine v. Davis, 301 U.S. 548 (1937), not only affirmed the Social Security Act, but also through its broad language became a landmark case for broad federal monetary powers which has been especially significant in the field of welfare. Like previous cases involving public employees, juveniles, and students, the court decided that welfare

⁸314 U.S. 174-175. ⁹Hagen, 115.

recipients also had a right to full protection under the Bill of Rights. Furthermore, the Court has played a significant role in limiting local/state control over welfare benefits. In King v. Smith, 392 U.S. 309 (1968), the Court invalidated an Alabama statute cutting off welfare benefits to children in households where an alternative male figure could be assumed to be responsible for their care. In 1970, the Court ruled that an individual on welfare could not have benefits terminated until he or she first had a hearing which preceded suspension of payments.¹⁰ Clearly, then, social welfare has come to be perceived as an area of appropriate concern for the federal government, and not solely that of the local community.¹¹

In the meantime, the most recent and significant opportunity to test the validity of governmental subsidies to sectarian welfare institutions arose with the passage in 1947 of the Hospital Survey and Construction Act, commonly known as the Hill-Burton Act. In the wake of increasing demand for more adequate health care, this legislation sought to encourage the construction, replacement, and remodeling of hospitals and related medical facilities by subsidizing the costs incurred through such improvements. Depending upon the state, a varying percentage of the total cost of hospital construction was allocated through federal grants to state and local governments and to private sectarian and nonsectarian institutions. One condition for eligibility for funds under the Hill-Burton Act was nondiscrimination by reason of race, creed, or national origin. Federal tax funds were therefore

¹⁰Goldberg v. Kelley, 397 U.S. 254 (1970).

¹¹Samuel Krislov, "American Welfare Policy and the Supreme Court," Current History 65 (July 1973) 34-35.

available to sectarian hospitals.¹²

The constitutionality of the Hill-Burton act has been tested several times in the state courts. Kentucky Building Commission v. Effron, 200 S.W. 2d 836 (1949), is typical. The plaintiffs in the Kentucky case contested the constitutionality of grants to private sectarian institutions on the ground that the state constitution allows grants only for public services. After ruling that "the construction of non-profit hospital facilities is a public purpose," the Kentucky Court of appeals distinguished between the sponsorship and the purpose of an institution: "A private agency may be utilized as a pipe-line through which a public expenditure is made, the test being not who receives the money, but the character of the use for which it is expended."¹³ In its concluding remarks, the Court addressed the place of private sectarian agencies in governmental programs:

In their inception hospitals were charitable organizations sponsored by religious sects which owned and operated them. In recent years the National and State Governments have enacted much social legislation in an endeavor to relieve charitable institutions in caring for the sick. . . . Recognizing that these institutions were in existence and being operated efficiently through their own boards, the Federal and State Governments have thought it more practical to aid them rather than to build new ones. Certainly, it was never the intention of the framers of Section 5 of our Constitution to prevent the State from aiding with monies raised by taxes an institution rendering a public service merely because the governing body of the institution is composed of one denomination.¹⁴

Although the United States Supreme Court has not had the opportunity to review the Hill-Burton Act, the overwhelming majority of opinions of the lower courts present a fair argument for the inclusion of denominational hospitals in public aid programs. Even though these hospitals

¹²Coughlin, 47. ¹³Ibid., 48.

¹⁴220 S.W. 2d 836 (1949), quoted in *ibid.*, 48.

were established through motivations of Christian charity and continue to be a part of the church's healing ministry, the work they do cannot be categorically described as a sectarian act. Sectarian hospitals which serve patients of all faiths—or no faith—in a non-indoctrinational manner are only performing a service the state would otherwise be required to provide; in this sense it is appropriate for the state to aid sectarian welfare institutions, whereas it would be improper for it to do so if the recipient were a denominational school which undertakes religious instruction. While the Constitution prohibits governmental aid to organizations which primarily serve religious or sectarian purposes, it does not deny the validity of dealing with them on fair and equal terms.

A further question of government aid to sectarian welfare institutions is raised by the use of church-related institutions in governmental programs to eliminate poverty at home and abroad. The first instance of this phenomenon was the Peace Corps program begun in 1961. Soon after the program was established, Peace Corps Director R. Sargent Shriver announced that twelve of its initial projects would be administered through private agencies, about half of which were religious. The announcement evoked sharp protest from separationist churches, and the idea was aborted before ever being implemented.¹⁵

The Peace Corps program was followed by the Anti-Poverty program enacted by Congress in 1964. The purpose of the Anti-Poverty Act—officially the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964—was to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this nation by opening to everyone

¹⁵Leo Pfeffer, Church, State, and Freedom (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 202-204.

the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity. Title I of the act provided substantial sums for work-training programs, work-study programs, and adult basic education programs. Its primary agency was the Job Corps. Title II attempted to provide stimulation and incentive for communities to mobilize their resources to combat poverty through substantial federal grants. Its prime mover was the Urban and Rural Community Action Programs. Both Titles involve church-state problems. Sectarian institutions and organizations are included in Title I under the stipulation that federal funds are not to be used for any purpose furthering solely religious instruction or worship. Title II classifies sectarian organizations as a type of community action organization, again providing that funds are not used for specifically religious purposes. The Anti-Poverty Act set the stage and provided the motif for its successor the following year, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The legal implications of the church-state problems in the Anti-Poverty Act were therefore decided under its more comprehensive successor.¹⁶

Another door was opened through which the government could wage war on poverty via the programs of religious organizations when the child-benefit theory was used as a justification for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.¹⁷ In effect this doctrine states that public monies may be appropriated to private sectarian organizations and institutions if the money is spent for the benefit of the child

¹⁶Ibid., 204.

¹⁷Lyle E. Schaller, The Churches' War on Poverty (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967) 81.

and not for the benefit of the sponsoring institution. The Act authorized the expenditure of large sums of federal funds to provide special educational services and books for educationally deprived children of low income families, including children enrolled in church-related schools. The Supreme Court reaffirmed two earlier decisions¹⁸ in ruling in favor of the constitutionality of secular textbook loans to parochial school children in Board of Education v. Allen, 392 U.S. 236 (1968). In it, Mr. Justice White, author of the opinion, reasoned that the practice was constitutional because "no funds or books are furnished to parochial schools, and the financial benefit is to parents and children not to schools."¹⁹ In several cases involving this and similar acts, the Court has carefully delineated what types of expenditures were permissible under the Constitution and what types were not permissible.²⁰ While the immediate application of the act was the purchase of textbooks and services out of public coffers for children in private (including church) schools, the same reasoning could be and, indeed, has been used to justify funding of a variety of sectarian programs designed to benefit poverty-stricken children. Typical would be the federal milk program (which also subsidizes children in parochial schools and religious summer camps) and programs for the distribution of surplus government food.

Church-state relationships in welfare practices is not a dead

¹⁸Cochran v. Louisiana State Board of Education, 281 U.S. 370 (1930), and Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

¹⁹392 U.S. 236.

²⁰Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971); Committee For Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist, 413 U.S. 756 (1973); Meek v. Pittenger, 421 U.S. 349 (1975).

issue. Several cases are still pending before the courts. In New York, that state's child welfare system has been charged with violations of the First Amendment, the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Eighth Amendment. The basic complaint is that voluntary agencies--receiving a substantial portion of their funds from the federal government--give preference in child selection to children whose religious affiliation matches the agency's affiliation (Wilder, et. al. v. Sugarman, et. al., 385 F. Supp. 1013). The maintenance of the religious character of church-related institutions which rely on public funds is an issue before the courts which is most often associated with cases regarding parochial schools, but the same point may be made regarding church-related welfare institutions. Justice John Paul Stevens stated in his dissent in the Roemer case:

I would add emphasis to the pernicious tendency of a state subsidy to tempt religious schools to compromise their religious mission without wholly abandoning it. The disease of entanglement may infect a law discouraging wholesome religious activity as well as a law encouraging the propagation of a given faith.²¹

This principle can be illustrated in a Kansas case, Americans United v. Bubb, in which five Kansas colleges were ruled ineligible for state tuition educational grants--one school because it favored Missouri Synod Lutheran students in admissions, three others for making chapel attendance compulsory, and one because it required an expression of faith before graduation. The five colleges all abandoned these legal requirements in order to qualify for state aid.²²

Another issue yet to be decided regards federal intervention

²¹Quoted in John M. Swomley, Jr., "The Decade Ahead In Church-State Issues," Christian Century 98 (February 25, 1981) 202.

²²Ibid.

in states that have strict constitutional provisions against aid to religious agencies. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended in 1974 permits the U. S. Commissioner of Education--now the Secretary of Education--to bypass state and local agencies under certain conditions. In a case being contested in Missouri (where public funding of church-related institutions is prohibited) parochial school administrators asked the Department of Education to allocate funds to parochial schools for special reading and other instruction for educationally disadvantaged students in low-income areas. Following guidelines in the bypass provision, a nonprofit corporation set up and sponsored by a church is receiving and channeling such aid.²³

Finally, the recent movement among churches to provide sanctuary to undocumented refugees--currently understood to be illegal with the possible result of large fines or imprisonment--has yet to be tested in the courts. It is not entirely clear whether the courts will find such activity to be in violation of the law. At any rate, the legality of this phase of the churches' welfare activity and the eligibility of these refugees for public welfare benefits is yet to be determined.²⁴

So as governmental participation in welfare has increased, constitutional law as well as health and welfare programs and practices have attempted to utilize displaced church programs. Through the Hill-Burton Act, through various programs sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity, and through the many types of purchase of service

²³Ibid.

²⁴Dean Peerman, "Should Churches Provide Sanctuary?" Christian Century 100 (April 27, 1983) 387.

agreements in the fields of child welfare, institutional care of children and the elderly, and other programs, the government at every level encourages the churches in their health and welfare endeavors. The Supreme Court decisions have protected the resulting partnership within the limits of the First Amendment.

THEOLOGICAL/ETHICAL ISSUES

It is clear from the study in Chapter 2 of the biblical understanding of the poor and poverty that the church has a special concern for, a vested interest in, the poor and the problem of poverty. It has even been said that a church which is not a church of the poor has ceased to be the church. But what are the theological/ethical boundaries within which the church's mission as a church of the poor takes place?

It must be said at the outset that the church's mission regarding the poor and poverty needs to be seen within the wider realm of the church's overall ministry. There are two contexts within which the church's ministry in general and the church's ministry regarding the poor and poverty in particular occur--the general context and the specific context. The church's response to its general context serves the same function at all times, in all places, for all people. That function is to be a witness to God before humanity. But for each and every age the church is also immersed in a specific context, the local scene and current events. For this specific context which continually changes from place to place and from day to day, the church must also be constantly changing and adapting its program in order that it might make its general witness relevant to the people it serves.

The general context of the church's ministry involves the sever-

al concerns with which the church must always deal. The church must always deal, at least, with a vision of: (1) the Judeo-Christian God, Yahweh; (2) Jesus, the Christ; (3) humanity; and (4) the remainder of the created order. Within these four areas the church must always work. Where these four concerns are the core of a church's ministry (regardless of the innumerable ways in which they may be interrelated), there is the Church Universal. For the purposes of this study, these four factors are interrelated in such a way that the *Christian Church may be defined as a corporate body created as an instrument of God and given to humanity as (1) a pastoral, prophetic, advisory, celebrative, and paradigmatic witness to the Kingdom of free and responsible love and justice--for all the created cosmos--of Yahweh, who is the Lord God, the Creator of the World, its Sustainer, its Savior, and its Judge, as shown through Jesus the Christ, and (2) a source of empowering people to respond to that Kingdom.*

The Church is a witness to the love and justice of Yahweh as Creator of the World. To speak of God in the traditional term Creator is to mean something more like God as a Transformer--bringing order out of chaos, new life out of old. To speak of God as Creator-Transformer is to speak of Yahweh in the trinitarian sense of God the Father. This traditional phrase, although unfortunate in its use of human imagery, contains an important concept of God as generative (to use Erik Erikson's term for a similar human phenomenon). This important stage in the human life cycle roughly corresponds to the age of parenthood, but it is not a stage exclusively for parents. Generativity is more inclusive than mere parenthood, for it is a state of maturity which is characterized by the need to establish and guide others, to prepare them to live fruitful lives,

and to make the world better for them. Although generativity is most often expressed by parenthood, it is often expressed in other ways (including productivity and creativity). It is the desire to transform things anew. For God to create through transformation means that God is not some wonderful magician zapping matter into existence out of a vacuum with lightening bolts and thunder. God is not all powerful; instead, God works within the world as we know it, the realm of time and history, to creatively transform the world. Yahweh transformed the primordial matter into the orderly universe. The Lord is the creative power which moves history forward.

The church is a witness to the love and justice of Yahweh as the Sustainer of the World. God's creating-transforming activity is not limited to a time when a "big bang" formed the universe. God transforms anew in the present. It is by this transforming power which continues to move history forward, bring forth life, and sustain the world in its orderly form that Yahweh is known as Sustainer. It is because of God's activity as Sustainer that the church can claim hope for the future.

Humanity is the crowning glory of God's creation. Of all creatures God created humans with free minds, capable of the highest possible enjoyment of life. To fulfill the human potential to be fully alive is to experience the height of inner affirmation and joy by going beyond one's self and recognizing that each person is part of a larger creation—that is, the entire Universe—and affirming the universal value of all God's creation. Through this affirmation of the value of all God's creation, humanity remains in communion with Yahweh.

People are to respond to God with thanksgiving for the abundance of life. Full aliveness, the life of faith, means that to be

truly human is to acknowledge for others and to experience for one's self the freedom and responsibility which allows all God's creation to exist in love and justice. So God gave to humans this freedom and responsibility as dominion over the earth, to act as stewards or trustees to keep the earth for the production of abundant life. Humans are thus capable of aiding Yahweh's sustaining activity. But their free minds lead humans astray, for they think too highly of themselves; they refuse to affirm for anything but themselves the fullness of life and give glory to God for it—they refuse to aid in Yahweh's sustaining activity for all creation. Humans are not willing to let God be God and to accept their humble position as dependent creatures, a part of God's creation. This is the human sin through which humanity separates itself from God. Because of God's love, God's generative need to see the creation reach fulfillment, Yahweh found it necessary to be revealed as the Savior of the World.

The church is a witness to the love and justice of Yahweh as the Savior of the World. When humanity becomes separated from God, God's standard of the total affirmation of life becomes beyond human reach. Since God's creative work is done within history, the plan to reconcile humanity and Yahweh was revealed within history in the person of a man named Jesus. This is God traditionally pictured as the Son, for in Jesus God's creating-transforming activity received its perfect form. When speaking of Jesus it is particularly appropriate to refer to him in the traditional terms of fully human and simultaneously fully divine. In Jesus, God revealed humanity as it was meant to be. Fully free of mind, yet Jesus affirmed the fullness of life, returned thanks to God for it, and demonstrated that through perfect servanthood—making

the fullness of life available to others and empowering them to respond to it--is the highest enjoyment of life possible for all people. In Jesus, God's need for the creation to reach fulfillment was satisfied. Jesus was fully divine in that in him Yahweh's transforming, sustaining, and saving power fully resided. The spirit of God's creative transformation, traditionally called the Logos, fully resided in Jesus as the incarnate Christ. He accomplished Yahweh's plan of reconciliation for humans by perfectly affirming that life and humanity which is lived as it can and is meant to be is a gateway to more life; Jesus thus becomes a second Adam indeed, demonstrating that all those who believe that God reconciles people who, because of Jesus, respond to life in love for Yahweh and servanthood to all creation in thought and action shall themselves receive life. In his life, death, and resurrection he embodied a new humanity, perfectly reconciled to God and triumphant over every enemy of human good. So, reconciliation and the fulfillment of creation were accomplished in the past, but reconciliation itself continues in the present as humans respond to the life and message of Jesus. This response is the affirmation of life and of the value of all God's creation.

The church is a witness to the love and justice of Yahweh as the Judge of the World. All humanity will be judged according to the standard for which it was created: whether each person affirmed life in all its fullness, thanked God for it, and helped sustain and empower the world for an even more full life. Those who believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of life and follow his example of making the world fit for a higher quality of life for all the cosmos are reconciled to God.

The church is a witness to the love and justice of Yahweh as Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Judge through the ministries of being pastoral, prophetic, advisory, celebrative, and paradigmatic. Through the pastoral ministry, the church comforts the afflicted and provides for them out of the spirit of God's sustenance. It is in its pastoral ministry that the church is at action, ministering to all of creation by affirming the fullness of life and giving thanks to God for it. The pastoral ministry is nurturing people to develop toward a preferred future wherein the entire cosmos is free and its inhabitants participate responsibly in it. Through prophecy the church afflicts the comfortable by calling itself and the rest of the world to live according to the precepts which God has set forth for humanity—that is, living according to the will of God. The prophetic ministry witnesses to the madness of our society and points to the vision of a preferred future which God has begun in Jesus the Christ, called the Kingdom of God. Through the ministry of advice and counsel, the church seeks to guide and influence those in power that they might rule with the love and justice of Yahweh. The advisory ministry recalls the "wise men" who acted as consultants to the rulers of the ancient Middle East. This calls the church to work not only with all levels of government but also with those in other types of power-positions to help move society toward a preferred future. Through the ministry of celebration, the church worships and praises God for the fullness of life in creation, and for the vision of the kingdom in which all the cosmos participates in that full life. It is the act of affirming the life we have been given, celebrating and giving thanks to God for it. Through its paradigmatic ministry, the church sets an example for all the world. It lives

in the world as a redeemed community revealing the nearness and reality of the vision of the kingdom. As a paradigm of the Kingdom, the Christian community puts to practice the love and justice of Yahweh to those within the community and to those whom the community encounters.

It is important not to confuse the Church Universal with the local church. The Church Universal is an invisible entity, but it must speak and act through real people and real local churches. However, it does not speak and act through all people (not even all church-goers!) or all churches. Nor does it speak and act through the same people or the same churches at all times. So, even though the Church Universal is made up of real people and churches, it is not the people and/or churches themselves. It is a spiritual reality which manifests itself in concrete form. It is in this sense that the church is appropriately called by the metaphor Body of Christ, for it continues in the world as the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus to do the work he did on earth—the church affirms life, gives thanks to God for it, and responds to the fullness of life by working for, and calling and empowering others to work for, a creation capable of sustaining more and fuller life. The church thus becomes an extension of the fullness of creation, humanity as it was meant to be, the Body of Christ, the instrument of God bringing reconciliation to humanity.

This is the central content of the Christian Gospel which remains the same throughout history. However, it must be interpreted and related uniquely by each generation and each person who deals with it. The church and everyone in it must come to terms with this central message of the faith as it applies to their specific context.

The specific context of the church at the present time is shaped

by the overarching problem that in the coming decades the entire world faces a physically and spiritually impoverished humanity and a physically threatened biosphere. This can be seen in a wide variety of ways and to a degree which has never before been seen. In the world-wide scene today there are several factors which are of prime importance: (1) the lack and dwindling supply of food and other natural resources which threaten present and future generations; (2) the inequitable distribution of the food and resources available; (3) the intense poverty of the majority of humanity; (4) the lack of adequate education and health care for many; (5) growing rates of population growth; (6) the misuse of technology and power; (7) pollution and related ecological problems; (8) the breakdown of the established world politico-economic order and the consequences of this for all humanity; and (9) the increase of racial, religious, economic, and national sectarianism in a world that must increasingly work together to survive.

Within this global perspective is the local perspective of the church's ministry situated within American society. Here is the problem of (10) the confusion of our identity, caused largely by the increasing pluralism of our society; (11) our unwillingness to be open to creating new roles for the church and for Christians in reversing the world's problems, which we all helped to create; (12) our unwillingness to take a strong stand for God's love, justice, and righteousness as revealed by Jesus the Christ for fear that we will interfere with the "rights" to religious, economic, and personal freedom which our society guarantees to all; and (13) the lack of a clear and workable theology on the part of the church and most Christians which will help it and them cope with the problems they face.

The present goal for the church should be the establishment of a just, participatory, and sustainable global society. The establishment of justice guarantees the availability of basic human necessities and rights for all, including the poor; the establishment of a participatory society guarantees a voice for the voiceless and power for the powerless; the establishment of sustainability guarantees justice and participation for all, including future generations; the existence of justice, participation and sustainability within a global society guarantees the widest possible vision, the most inclusive perspective, for the pursuit of a preferred future. In this way, perhaps the physical and spiritual impoverishment of the human race and the threat to the biosphere will be sharply reduced and, eventually, even eliminated. In this way, God's kingdom of love and justice might reign. In this way, people might be empowered to respond to the invitation of the kingdom to live a full, free, and responsible life. The transforming and sustaining power of God in Christ gives hope that this goal can be realized.

The church should operate on these concerns within a healthy perspective which is ecumenical and local. Indeed, the most striking fact of our time is that all the major issues, whether political, economic, or social, are global and interrelated in character. There is ample evidence that wherever there are conflicts, the interests of those all over the world are involved. An ecumenical perspective, the cooperation of the world-wide church, is not only a hope for the future kingdom of God, but is now a requirement for an adequate response by the churches to the present situation. However, it is the local congregation which must remain as the strategic base for the church's work. Therefore,

a major task of the church's ministry must be to help lay the foundation for the eventual establishment of a just and loving society in which all the cosmos participates equally, freely, and responsibly at the highest level that our resources can sustain, living fully—the kingdom of God—through the local congregation.

In recent months, an increasing amount of emphasis has been placed on the responsibility of the private sector and, in particular, the churches, to provide for the needs of the poor. For example, one editorial in a Cincinnati newspaper said:

Fundamental human needs need not be the concern of governments, but of individuals, of families, of communities, and of charitable and religious organizations.²⁵

There is no question, based on the study in Chapter 2 of the biblical understanding of the poor and poverty, that the poor are a special responsibility of the church. But it is important to affirm that, from an ethical point of view, government also has a responsibility for the poor from which it cannot escape. Pope John Paul II hinted at this responsibility in a homily delivered in 1979 at Yankee Stadium. After encouraging and commending the charitable work of individuals and the church, he added:

But this is not enough. Within the framework of your national institutions and in cooperation with all your compatriots, you will also want to seek out the structural reasons which foster or cause the different forms of poverty in the world and in your own country, so that you can apply the proper remedies. You will not allow yourselves to be intimidated or discouraged by over-simplified explanations, which are more ideological than scientific, explanations which try to account for a complex evil by some single cause. But neither will you recoil before the reforms—even profound ones—of attitudes and structures that may prove necessary in order to recreate over and over again the conditions needed by the disadvantaged if they

²⁵Quoted in Joseph L. Bernardin, "America's Social Sin," Commonweal 109 (September 24, 1982) 491.

are to have a fresh chance in the hard struggle of life.²⁶

These powerful words call not merely for greater charity for the poor, but for justice also. They are rooted in the thinking of Pope John XXIII, who addressed the problem of determining the appropriate role for government in the development of public policy in Mater et Magistra, saying,

To safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person and to facilitate the fulfillment of his duties, should be the essential office of every public authority. . . . One of the fundamental duties of civil authorities is to coordinate social relations in such a fashion that the exercise of a person's rights does not threaten others in the exercise of their own rights nor hinder in fulfillment of their duties.²⁷

It is clear, then, that the common good, which government is obligated to defend and to promote, requires that the individual's rights be respected. But it also requires the government to take action as needed and appropriate to defend those rights.

The search for a just, participatory, and sustainable global society, when applied to the topic at hand, means first of all that the church must assume a position of advocacy for the poor. This includes both work to provide for their immediate needs and work to provide for their future needs by insisting on a just economic and social order. However, there may be many ways of achieving this common goal. Arriving at specific policies may be difficult, especially since the church generally does not have any special expertise in the political, social and economic fields. Furthermore, there are real problems and limitations (such as the U. S. economy and budget deficit) which must be acknowledged and taken into account. The church's specific contri-

²⁶Quoted in *ibid.* ²⁷Quoted in *ibid.*

bution to the public debate about priorities and particular programs or legislation, therefore, must be more in the form of principles which should serve as the criteria for evaluating and developing public policy.

In 1975, the American Catholic bishops outlined seven such principles:

1. Economic activity should be governed by justice and be carried out within the limits of morality. It must serve people's needs.
2. The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for one-self and one's family belongs to everyone.
3. Economic prosperity is to be assessed not so much from the sum total of goods and wealth possessed as from the distribution of goods according to norms of justice.
4. Opportunities to work must be provided for those who are able and willing to work. Every person has the right to useful employment, to just wages, and to adequate assistance in case of real need.
5. Economic development must not be left to the sole judgment of a few persons or groups possessing excessive economic power, or to the political community alone. On the contrary, at every level the largest possible number of people should have an active share in directing that development.
6. A just and equitable system of taxation requires assessment according to ability to pay.
7. Government must play a role in the economic activity of its citizens. Indeed, it should promote in a suitable manner the production of a sufficient supply of material goods. Moreover, it should safeguard the rights of all citizens and help them find opportunities for employment.²⁸

Finally, the move towards greater governmental responsibility in welfare has posed special ethical problems for church-related welfare institutions, in that it has greatly modified voluntary—including sectarian—programs and posed certain dangers for them. More and more private welfare agencies are finding that their choice of services and clients is determined by the vast power of the government to raise

²⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, 492.

money by taxation and to specify its use by the power of law and the purse. These voluntary agencies--always critically pressed for money and desperately aware of the unmet need--have reached hungrily for funds without much thought of the consequences of departing from the principles of their origins. They have glossed over this shift with such comforting phrases as "partnership," "joint planning," "program development," "challenge," and "wider service," supported by the rhetoric of those who see the private agency as the panacea for the ills of modern government. In the new partnership they see the best of both worlds: access to unlimited financial resources to meet the burgeoning need, along with the freedom, pluralism, adaptability, and community focus that is traditionally associated with voluntarism.

Dean M. Kelley, Director of the Department of Religious Liberty of the National Council of Churches, rebutted these kinds of arguments by warning that in their hurry to get into the act, the churches may be sacrificing the unique roles and contributions which they have to offer. Cooperation with governmental agencies under legislation such as the Economic Opportunity Act becomes a diversion from this task. By becoming sub-contractors for the federal government, the churches cannot remain free for engagement in forms of social action necessary for expressing and communicating the gospel.²⁹

There can be no doubt that the availability of governmental funds has affected the program priorities of many churches. The most obvious example is probably the Head Start project and similar programs for children and young people.

²⁹Quoted in Schaller, 84.

Churches and councils of churches that had absolutely no idea of becoming involved in such activities suddenly found themselves in 1965 and 1966 downgrading the priority of some of their other responsibilities in order to participate in these anti-poverty programs. On a smaller scale the same shifting of priorities occurred as churches saw the chance to obtain federal funds for an expansion of their work with migrants, to participate in the work-study, re-training, literacy, and community organization programs.³⁰

In some cases, the churches have fought over federal funds as political agencies, disregarding the needs of its welfare recipients. In 1959, when Clarence Francis, Food Adviser to President Eisenhower, sought to shift responsibility for large-scale family feeding and school lunch programs from voluntary to governmental agencies, the churches put up such opposition that the idea was dropped—they preferred to do their good works with governmental assistance rather than lose their funds and let the government do the work itself (with a greater probability of reaching more hungry people). Private welfare agencies fought for federal funds not only to expand programs and services, but also to retain their very identity and reason for existence in the face of massive efforts financed by public monies.³¹

By entering into alliance with the government, the churches may have surrendered part of their freedom to speak prophetically and critically of the policies, actions, and programs of the government. Few dare criticize the ally who is supplying ninety percent of the funds for the war. The government does not ordinarily finance revolutions against the *status quo*. Generally, those who are in power like things just as they are, and those who do not like them do not have the power

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dean M. Kelley, "Operational Consequences of Church-State Choices," Social Progress 57 (January-February 1967) 18.

to change them. Such close cooperation between the church and state as has been recently witnessed in welfare programs serves to tie the goals of the church to those of the state. The church, consciously or unconsciously, may then follow the political aims of the state rather than serving all people impartially.

It was previously pointed out that the vast governmental expenditures in the field of welfare have made the private sectarian contribution to welfare exceedingly small and of decreasing significance. The attempt by the churches to offset this by sharing governmental monies can, in some instances, serve to negate the benefits that voluntary organizations have to offer. In a healthy, free society, they may (1) challenge the monopolistic tendencies of large government by providing viable alternatives to meeting common needs; (2) challenge sterile bureaucracies by more humane service; and (3) challenge the failures of the social order in terms of unmet human needs.³²

This is not to say that the churches should never use governmental funds to support its programs. Rather, it is to say that the churches must be careful to use public monies in such a way that the unique and independent roles of churches in society may be preserved. For instance, the sequence of events leading to the use of public funds for a church-related welfare institution should always be: (1) the church establishes the presence of a need; (2) the church establishes priorities, goals, and programs which it feels will best meet the need; (3) the church seeks funds from its various sources, including governmental sources, which are available or can be made available for the

³²Neil Gilbert and Harry Specht, The Emergence of Social Welfare and Social Work (Itasca, IL: Peacock 1976) 161.

program.

Never should the churches change programs merely to take advantage of government funds which have become available. When funds become available for which the churches have no program, then it may be that the churches need to reassess the needs they are addressing. But only after an independent reassessment can the churches legitimately change their programs in response to legislation. Such care in church use of government funds assures both the appropriate application of the conduit theory advanced by the courts and the preservation of the churches' independent and unique role as an ethical force in society.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

Although federal funds for poverty programs began to decline in the mid-1970's, the Reagan Administration accelerated this trend manifold when it took office in 1981. To compensate for his massive budget cuts, President Reagan called for a new "spirit of volunteerism" among the American people. The funding cutbacks, the transfer of authority for poverty programs to the states, localities, and private sector, and the call for increased volunteerism and philanthropy raise significant practical questions regarding the wisdom of such policies: Can the states and the private sector--the churches--make up the difference in lost funds? Are there enough willing volunteers to replace lost personnel?

It is clear on several fronts that the private sector, and especially the churches, cannot make up the lost funds. The federal budget cuts are drastically undermining the private, nonprofit charitable organizations. Between fiscal 1982 and 1985 they stand to lose an

average of \$8.25 billion a year in government aid, according to the Urban Institute.³³ It is an illusion to think that private giving can fill that gap. Corporations gave a total of \$3 billion in 1981; to keep the charities at their present level of services they would have to triple their contributions. Individual giving would have to grow almost three times as fast as it has in recent years.

Of the nonprofit organizations affected by the budget cuts, those which provide health and welfare services will be hit the hardest. Such organizations typically get less support from business than nonprofit organizations supporting the arts. Corporations give the most to traditional charities such as the Red Cross, YMCA, and public broadcasting. "If a company raises its donations, it will more likely benefit the Boy Scouts than the struggling day-care centers for low-income working women."³⁴

Of course, churches and synagogues are the sources of much financial support for the needy in the United States. But they, too, are hard-pressed. According to Jim Bergin of Bread For The World, the Ohio Hunger Task Force made a study of Franklin County in and around the city of Columbus, and found that the area stands to lose \$7 million in food stamp benefits from the Reagan cuts. If the Franklin County churches immediately doubled the amount of food donations given last year, they would still be \$6 million short of replacing the value of the lost food stamps.³⁵ James A. Hickey, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, D.C.,

³³Jane Bryant Quinn, "The Charities Come Up Short," Newsweek 101 (January 3, 1983) 61.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵James M. Wall, "Federal Government: Monster or Servant?" Christian Century 99 (January 27, 1982) 75.

has said that it will be impossible for the churches and other voluntary institutions to meet the needs of poor people dropped from government-financed welfare programs in the Washington area and around the country.

The religious community has been and will continue to serve those in need, but our efforts cannot and should not substitute for a national commitment to build a just³⁶ society which respects the human dignity and rights of each of us.

To further compensate for his massive budget cuts, President Reagan also vowed that his administration would do what it could to encourage more private philanthropy. But the promise is backed by an economic policy which undercuts many incentives to give. For example, the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives is pushing corporations to raise their contributions to 2 percent of pre-tax income, up from 1.24 percent in 1981. But liberal new tax-depreciation rules permit corporations to report sharply lower pretax incomes. If a company holds its contribution steady in a year when reported profits shrink, the percentage of profits given to charity will increase even though the dollars received by charitable institutions will remain the same. Likewise, individual giving has also lost a significant incentive through the 1981 tax law which all but eliminated estate taxes. The effect is to make it less attractive to make bequests or set up charitable trusts. And with lower tax rates, the after-tax cost of deductible gifts is higher. This new round of disincentives for charitable giving follows a decade during which philanthropic donations failed to keep pace with inflation.³⁷

³⁶Marjorie Hyer, "Churches Can't Aid All Needy," Washington Post (February 6, 1982) B6c.

³⁷Quinn, 61.

In addition to the inability of the private sector to make up for the substantial funds lost in the recent round of budget cuts, it is unlikely that there is a sufficient volunteer labor pool ready to fill the positions of laid-off workers in the organizations most affected. In 1980, the United States was a society where 23 percent of all households were made up of only one person, and 20 percent of all children lived in households with only one parent. A mobile and pluralistic society, the chances for group cohesion and ethnic identification with the poor are slim. Those capable of providing volunteer services--those with higher incomes or jobs which allow substantial free time to volunteer--are less likely to live close to those in need or strongly identify with them. Economic pressures on middle-class individuals are forcing many to hold second jobs, and women who might have devoted their time to volunteer work a decade ago are now in the work force helping their own families maintain their standard of living and pursuing their own personal career goals.³⁸

Contrary to President Reagan's philosophy, voluntarism has never been an adequate response to the needs of the poor in the United States, and probably never will be adequate. One observer of poverty in the United States has identified a major characteristic of welfare policy by saying:

There has never been a golden age of voluntarism in America. Some level of government always has been active, usually providing most of the money. Voluntarism never has proven adequate to the problems of urban welfare.³⁹

³⁸Peter C. Kratcoski, "Can Volunteers Save the Day?" USA Today 110 (January 1982) 70.

³⁹Michael B. Katz, Poverty and Policy in American History (New York: Academic Press, 1983) 240.

Finally, President Reagan's program for turning the responsibility for welfare over to the states and private sector raises practical questions about the states' ability and willingness to pay for such services, and about how the poor would fare under such a system. One indication is the contribution made by the states now to the poor. The following table⁴⁰ shows the dollar amounts of welfare payments set by each state in 1961 for a family of three, and the state's share of that payment. By themselves, the total monthly welfare payments don't tell much about a state's generosity, since resources and per capita incomes vary greatly from state to state.

The way to judge a state's concern for the poor is to compare its contribution to the total monthly payment with its average monthly per capita income. By that measure, New York is the top performer. The Southern states tend to be underachievers.

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, a congressionally financed research organization, assesses a state's generosity toward the poor in a different way. ACIR believes that per capita income, while an accurate measure of a state's economic well-being, is not always a reliable indicator of taxing capacity. ACIR puts together all potential sources of a state's revenue, including personal income, sales, and natural resources, and computes per capita tax potential. That potential is shown as "state tax capacity" in the right-hand column of the table. A state's "tax effort" is based on the ratio of actual tax collections to tax capacity.

Despite its high per capita income, New York has a below-average

⁴⁰Walter Guzzardi, Jr., "Who Will Care For The Poor?" Fortune 105 (June 28, 1982) 39.

	Monthly Welfare payment	State Share	Share as % of per capita income	○ State tax capacity ● State tax effort		
				Below	Average	Above
Alaska	\$571	\$286	24%			● →
New York	\$507	\$249	26%		○	●
Vermont	\$506	\$159	22%	○	●	
California	\$506	\$253	25%		●	○
Connecticut	\$498	\$249	23%		●	○
Wisconsin	\$473	\$199	24%		○	●
Hawaii	\$468	\$234	25%		○	●
Michigan	\$464	\$232	25%		○	●
Minnesota	\$446	\$203	23%		○	●
Washington (State)	\$415	\$208	22%		●	○
Massachusetts	\$379	\$176	19%		○	●
Rhode Island	\$367	\$155	18%	○		●
Iowa	\$360	\$161	19%		●	○
New Jersey	\$360	\$180	18%		○	●
Kansas	\$353	\$168	19%	●		○
Nebraska	\$350	\$147	17%		○	●
Utah	\$348	\$109	16%	○	●	
Oregon	\$339	\$160	19%		●	○
North Dakota	\$334	\$127	14%	●		○
Pennsylvania	\$332	\$143	17%		○	●
New Hampshire	\$326	\$132	16%	●		○
South Dakota	\$321	\$102	14%		●	
Wyoming	\$315	\$158	16%	●		→
Colorado	\$313	\$149	16%		●	○
Virginia	\$310	\$132	15%		●	○
Idaho	\$305	\$105	14%		○	
Illinois	\$302	\$151	16%			●
Maine	\$301	\$ 88	12%	○		●
Oklahoma	\$282	\$113	13%	●		○
Montana	\$278	\$ 98	12%	●		○
Maryland	\$270	\$135	14%			○
Delaware	\$266	\$133	14%		●	○
Ohio	\$263	\$118	14%		●	○
Indiana	\$255	\$110	12%		●	○
Missouri	\$248	\$ 98	12%		●	○
Nevada	\$241	\$121	12%	●		○
New Mexico	\$233	\$ 76	11%		●	○
West Virginia	\$206	\$ 66	9%		●	○
Arizona	\$202	\$120	15%		○	●
Florida	\$195	\$ 82	10%	●	○	
North Carolina	\$192	\$ 62	9%	○	●	
Kentucky	\$188	\$ 60	9%		○	●
Georgia	\$183	\$ 62	8%		○	●
Louisiana	\$173	\$ 57	7%	●		○
South Carolina	\$129	\$ 38	6%	○	●	
Arkansas	\$122	\$ 34	5%	○	●	
Tennessee	\$122	\$ 38	5%	○	●	
Alabama	\$118	\$ 34	5%	○	●	
Texas	\$118	\$ 42	5%	●		○
Mississippi	\$ 96	\$ 22	4%	○	●	

tax capacity. However, its tax effort is the highest in the nation. When looked at along with the very high welfare payment of \$507, the figures pretty clearly show that New Yorkers are heavily taxed to help the poor. Texans, on the other hand, are not. Their tax capacity is among the highest in the country, and their support of the poor the second lowest. The social services of Texas are comparable to that of Wyoming, where the nation's second-highest tax capacity supports the fourth-lowest tax effort. The arrows for Wyoming and Alaska indicate taxable wealth so great that it runs off the chart.

The table shows that the behavior of state governments toward the poor is characterized only by diversity and no generality. States do not have equal capacities to raise money by taxes, and the need may be the greatest where the capacity is lowest. The state's track record regarding disbursements for welfare, while much better than two decades ago, is still remarkable in its unequal treatment of the poor. To turn the nations' welfare program over to the states would ensure that such inequities would multiply. The economies of states vary more widely than the national economy, and to some degree the well-being of states is determined by policies in Washington.⁴¹ To tie the poor to that roller coaster every year is unconscionable. The principal accomplishment of the Reagan Administration's decentralization of welfare would be to relieve the treasury of a heavy burden--but only by fragmenting the burden and shifting it elsewhere.

⁴¹Ibid., 42.

Chapter 5

THE WELFARE ALTERNATIVES

We have seen that, despite its considerable wealth, the United States does have a significant portion of its population living in poverty. This is an historical fact and a current reality. We have assessed the relevance of the poor and poverty to the life of the church through an examination of the biblical record. We have seen how three major factors--the nineteenth century combination of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization, together with the Great Depression and the 1960's social upheavals--began and completed in America the movement of social welfare programs from the hands of the churches to the hands of the government, and how the Reagan Administration accelerated a trend away from federal responsibility for the poor begun in the mid-1970's. In response to this philosophy of private rather than public responsibility for the poor, we have observed that even vigorous economic growth in the private sector does not necessarily reduce poverty more than marginally, and furthermore that the government's programs to attack poverty, while at times seriously flawed, frequently were effective across the whole range of human needs. We have also seen how the unique American ideology of separation of church and state combined with this shift of welfare programs to create problems in church-state relations. We have seen that these church-state problems were in part solved by non-discriminatory cooperation between the government and the churches, a policy validated legally by the Supreme Court and in practice by Congress and the Executive Branch. We have seen that this policy does, however, pose ethical and practical problems for the

churches. In conclusion, we here suggest a possible direction for the churches in light of the recent trends.

The churches have several possible alternatives in meeting the present welfare situation. They may decide to relinquish their interest in welfare and leave this sphere entirely to the government on the theory that the role of the church in conducting them has become obsolete or that the increased role the federal government expects of them is impossible. They may decide to continue their present operations in these areas and attempt to meet the financial problem by increased support from their own memberships or from private benefactors at large. They may also continue to turn to the government for such support as it is willing to give. Or, finally, they may turn their attention to meeting new and special needs of the poor which the government is not prepared to meet.

It is this last alternative which is the preferred option. However, it is also the most difficult. It requires serious thinking and re-thinking about the church's position and activity regarding the poor and poverty. The Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development of the World Council of Churches has set forth a ten-part proposal for the churches which serves well as the basis of these new reflections:¹

1. We propose that the churches align with the poor by sharing at appropriate levels, but mainly in direct ways, their struggles for justice, and by judging every decision by whether it helps the poor to fulfil their hopes and expectations.

If, as we discovered in Chapter 2, the poor are basic to the

¹Julio de Santa Ana, Towards A Church of the Poor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) 196-202.

church's understanding of itself, and if the good news is truly for the poor, then the church must judge every part of its life from the perspective of the poor. But that perspective can only be gained when the church is in the midst of the poor. Churches whose members are from the poor classes therefore become the front-line of the church's efforts. Their struggle for justice is guided by their Bible study and by their action/reflection on behalf of the poor. Churches whose members are not primarily from the poor can gain the perspective of the poor by directly participating with them in their struggles, and through advocacy for the poor (by which the poor and powerless are given a voice).

2. We propose that the churches develop and support action-study of the Bible among those who share the struggles of the poor for justice.

In a very special way, the poor see the relevance of the Bible for their lives.² Written by and for the poor (the people of God), the poor immediately see in the Bible's record of God's struggle for justice a picture of their own lives. As they struggle with the problems which accompany poverty—unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, ill-health, and so on—they do so in the midst of their Bible study. Their method of study thus becomes action/reflection: life lived, life reflected upon in the light of the Scripture, life transformed and renewed and lived again. Action/reflection offers to the churches of the poor and those with and for the poor new and exciting avenues of Bible study.

3. We propose that the churches search out groups of the poor from whose struggles new theological formulations may be arising, and commit resources of biblical and theological analysis to participation in those actions. We also propose to the churches that

²Ibid., 197.

they support programs which can help the development of theological thought rooted in the practice of the poor for justice and liberation.

A church which is aligned with the poor and which studies the Bible with action/reflection from the perspective of the poor will necessarily find itself reformulating the inherited theological concepts of the faith. Many of our historical theologies were formed in churches of the wealthy and powerful. Therefore fundamental theological concepts and ways of understanding the faith must be reformulated from the perspective of the poor and God's works of justice on their behalf.

4. We propose that the churches support [work expressing solidarity with the poor through empowering the powerless] by all means (including financial), provide communication linkages for it around the world, redirect traditional mission energies towards this kind of liberation praxis with the poor, and use this engagement for learning from the poor themselves.

Taking the side of the poor in their struggle for justice can take many different forms which must be defined according to each specific situation. Generally speaking, it entails the search for justice and what it means to be fully human. Such work does not offer ready-made ideologies to the poor, but seeks to create awareness and power in poor people so that they can participate in developing the kind of society they want to live in. This process of empowering the powerless to be able to participate fully in society and in God's creation occurs mainly through helping them organize themselves to address those power structures at the local level which keep them oppressed and in poverty. Such action at the local level, carried out within a global perspective, helps people to become aware of and empowered to deal with issues beyond the local level.

5. We propose that the churches commit resources of community organizers and action educators to the task of developing ways of analyzing the structures and contexts within which the struggles

for liberation occur through direct engagement with the poor, and that the methods thus learned be used in the formation of agents for the search of a just, participatory, sustainable and liberated society.

The work for justice for the poor must be studied and analyzed carefully in order to avoid its development into mere activism or escapism. An essential part of active learning is reflection on the context within which it occurs. When applied specifically to the problem of poverty, this means that the political, economic, and social structures which create destitution must be studied, as well as all the other forces which come to bear on the struggle for justice. Analysis of strategy and tactics must be made, and the need for appropriate alternative approaches in the face of resistance must be explored. Again, such study can only be legitimized when it is conducted in direct engagement with the poor and those who participate in their struggle, for only thus will traditional forms of analysis developed from the perspective of the powerful be overcome.

6. We propose that the churches seek active partnership with those movements for liberation which revindicate the rights of the poor, and from that participation work for new models of growth in the faith towards liberation.

The alignment and work of the churches with the cause of justice for the poor stands in an inevitable contradiction with the oppressive forces that dominate the lives of poor people. It is the church's task to direct the conflict which will arise from that contradiction in constructive and faithful ways.

The churches have traditionally been conditioned to avoid conflict and to expect the church not to disturb the calm of ongoing life. That conditioning must be overcome with creative ways of dealing with conflict when basic biblical principles such as justice for the poor

are at stake. The church must learn that it is in the very act of the poor's struggle against their oppressors that they are empowered to become more fully human.

It is possible that the struggle against poverty and the forces which create it will erupt in overt violence. While violence is never something that the thoughtful Christian can condone, the church must recognize that violence against the poor is a recurrent historical fact whenever oppressors have felt threatened. The issue is not a question of the churches opting for or against violence. It is an issue of the churches being aware that in situations of oppression, the poor are objects of aggression committed against them daily; the churches must decide what their position will be in relation to this type of violence. The church needs to work with integrity in its stand on the side of the poor without abandoning the pastoral sensitivity which frees the wealthy and powerful to change.

7. We propose that the churches develop radical new experiments in action/reflection models of learning and that they pursue a strategy of replacing the old educational ways with new types of popular education.

If the values of church members must be changed in order to align the churches with the cause of the poor, then this value formation is an educational issue which must be made to reflect this new commitment. Traditional educational practices and materials used in the churches have too often reinforced value systems of privilege, the behavior patterns of the dominant classes, and the privacy and charity of personal piety. All of these educational tools must be radically transformed to reflect the fellowship and solidarity of the churches with the poor. Central to this task is building awareness of and strategies against the power structures which form the context of poverty.

It is focused on the local situation, but done in a global perspective. It is born in the experience of the poor as they build awareness through their struggle; it is not education which begins with scholarship divorced from practice and experience. Furthermore, the church must remember that its members' values are formed in a plethora of ways outside the direct influence of the church. Reorienting education includes struggling against all these influences: traditional patterns of schooling which impose and reinforce passive behavior and negative self-images upon those who are being educated; patterns of authority throughout society that teach submission to the powerful and/or wealthy; values emphasized in mass-media advertising; and schools that educate for dependence.³

8. We propose that the churches challenge their programmes of lay and clergy education to explore radically new methods of engagement in the search for a just, participatory, and liberated society and the educational patterns possible in that search.

Just as there is a need for a radical new form of education for church members that both reflects and reinforces the churches' alignment and solidarity with the poor, so must there be a radically new form of education for church leadership, clergy and lay, which expresses the same values. The first step in this transformation is having those who are being trained for church leadership learn about the struggle for justice for the poor in the context of the poor themselves, learning with them in the place where they are. Their preparation must include training in the ideological framework of societies and the context, ideology, and theology of the struggle of the poor in the search for a just, participatory, and sustainable global society.

³Ibid., 200.

9. *We propose that the churches activate their various networks of support for the struggle of the poor, analyze their potential for the fight, and develop means of strengthening the connectional structures that can support the struggle against poverty and oppression.*

The struggle of the poor against structures of power suffers from an inherent problem: the poor, generally speaking, have no voice or power in the political or social system with which to effect change on their own behalf. Such movements of the poor need support structures and linkages among themselves. The churches have an important role to play here, for they have direct access to the poor through local congregations and, in many cases, connectional structures that can help provide support. The fellowship of churches can provide support in a number of ways: by applying economic aid in times of crisis; communication to mobilize forces against a common problem; and challenges to local groups working on specific problems to see the issue in a global perspective and to be open to allying themselves with other groups to more effectively initiate change. Those who work to open these connectional structures on behalf of the poor must be aware of the danger of removing the struggle for justice from the local level and losing the real context of poverty in bureaucratic institutions.

10. *We propose that the churches reconsider their organized structures to permit maximum deployment of their resources to the struggle for a just, participatory, liberated and sustainable society.*

If indeed the church is the Body of Christ, then at its best the church presents itself in a lean and muscular body that is well-suited for the struggle of the poor. A church which strives to work as a pastoral, prophetic, advisory, celebrative, and paradigmatic agent and witness to the Kingdom has many roles to play, and thus its most important characteristic is often flexibility. Heavy ecclesiastical

power structures--whether at a local, national, or international level--which represent vertical patterns of relationships, wealthy endowments, and luxurious furnishings provide fat in the Body of Christ which inevitably serve to alienate the poor. Churches must learn to look not only at society from the perspective of the poor, but at themselves and their own structures as well. Church structures, too, must reflect the churches' new solidarity with the poor.

Many churches in the United States are beginning to respond to the proposals set forth by the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development and other studies which have reached similar conclusions. The Church Council of Greater Seattle, Washington, and local church organizations in the Seattle area sponsored a conference on March 27, 1982. The "Filling the Gaps" conference brought together more than 450 people representing nine denominations to discuss ways of dealing with federal and state budget cuts. The conferees, most of them workers in social justice groups in their own congregations, arrived at many suggestions for action in their own context, including:

1. A commitment to urge denominational executives and local congregations to devote 10 percent of their budgets to direct human services;
2. A decision to coordinate efforts of the churches through the Church Council in the areas of employment and social services and to coordinate with the Community Information Hotline by use of computers;
3. Formal resolutions stating willingness to pay equitable taxes to support social services, asking the government to reinstate aid to Indochinese refugees, and calling for an immediate freeze in social service cuts in the federal and state budgets;
4. Establishment of a forum including church, union, and business leaders aimed at the problem of unemployment, which was called the most basic need; also formation of local groups in congregations to study employment needs and resources and to find internship possibilities;

5. Determination to continue and expand support of 6,000 housing units currently sponsored by local churches and efforts to encourage individuals to volunteer their homes for short-term emergency housing of abused women, pregnant teens and others;
6. A interest in expanding the Chore Ministry services sponsored by the Catholic Community Services to parishes not presently participating;
7. Many individual and area plans for specific efforts.⁴

In Toronto, Canada, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese is setting up an \$11.1 million program to provide work for up to 700 unemployed persons in the metropolitan area. The archdiocese will put up \$4.6 million of its own money with the balance coming from Ottawa and Queen's Park, the seat of Ontario government. New construction in the package will include a refuge for transients, a summer camp, and housing for university students. In addition, 37 churches in the city will be renovated, with entrances altered to improve access for the elderly and the disabled.⁵

In Alabama, a partnership of Lutheran churches, the federal government and community-based agencies recently came together to create a corporation that is hoping to create job opportunities for poor people in one of the most economically depressed areas of the country. The Tuskegee (Alabama) Capital Corporation was formed in March to operate the first minority-controlled Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment Company (MESBIC) in Alabama. The Rev. E. Taylor Harmon, an American Lutheran Church pastor and executive director of the Alabama Rural Council, said the MESBIC "is designed to provide capital investment

⁴Filling the Gap: Summary Report (Church Council of Greater Seattle, March 29, 1982)

⁵William A. Heins, "The Church, Unemployment, and the New Poor: 'My Name Is Legion,'" Your Church (September/October 1983) 40.

to disadvantaged persons, which includes equity or ownership purchase, direct loans and loan guarantees."⁶

In Southern California, the pressing need of the poor is often the need for shelter. A relatively newly-discovered problem around the country, many churches are struggling to find ways to meet the need. The federal government has thus far done little to help the homeless poor, and state, county, and municipal governments have done even less. Residency is often a prerequisite for government assistance. Coalitions, many including churches, such as the Westside Shelter Coalition, the Coalition for the Homeless in Orange County, the San Fernando Valley Coalition for Homeless Women and Children, and Clergy and Laity Concerned are developing shelters throughout the area.⁷

One Ministries, in Washington, D.C., is exploring another way to link churches in the suburbs and the ghetto. As John Stagg, director of the work, describes it, the church is society's best source of help. In his area there are 3,500 churches; his goal is to link a minority city church with a suburban one to serve one block near the inner-city church. At the start, two white ministers, Richard Halverson, then of Fourth Presbyterian Church, and Louis Evans, Jr., of National Presbyterian Church, were brought into fellowship with two blacks, Henry Gregory, of Shiloh Baptist Church, and Samuel Hines, of Third Street Church of God.

Initially, an urban and a suburban church are chosen, and the two ministers meet. Then lay coordinators from the two churches get

⁶Ibid.

⁷William Overend, "Attempts At Solutions to the Problem of the Homeless," Los Angeles Times (May 1, 1983) VI-1, 12.

together. This then expands to include interested members of both churches.

Next they set up a work day in the ghetto near the city church, and people from both churches--say National Presbyterian and Third Street Church of God--gather in their work clothes. They spend the first hour in devotions, studying the biblical mandate to serve one another. Then comes a half-hour orientation to the community. Finally they split into teams. If a home is to be painted or a roof repaired, enough teams are assigned to complete the job in four hours. After this all teams assemble for an hour of debriefing on what they have learned. Then those of the community they served plus the teams from the two churches sit down to a fellowship meal.⁸

Larry Snodgrass, United Methodist pastor in Homestead, Pennsylvania, a U.S. Steel town across the river from Pittsburgh, has become a leader in an anti-unemployment effort that has gotten national press coverage for its uniqueness and audacity. In fact, some of its targets--banks that invest in foreign steel at the expense of local steel jobs--call the plan radical and even un-American.

Snodgrass is one of the leaders in a group they called the Denominational Ministry Strategy, which includes clergypersons from the United Methodist, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Protestant Episcopal, and Lutheran denominations. The group decided first to attempt to have the Mon (short for Monongahela) Valley declared a disaster area and thus eligible for emergency aid, job retraining, extension of unemployment benefits, a moratorium on home foreclosures,

⁸Paul Fromer, "Beyond Pity: What Churches Can Do," Christianity Today 27 (May 20, 1983) 23.

and other benefits. But government officials turned them down, saying that the current emergency relief does not apply to economic disasters. (The local union in Homestead in early 1983 had only about 2,000 of its 7,000 members working in steel jobs.)

Next the ministers contacted Pittsburgh-area corporations to ask for their help in the emergency aid effort, but they received little help there. So they moved into the third, and most controversial, stage of their effort. Stated simply, they are asking many thousands of bank depositors to transfer their money from banks that won't invest in the depressed mill towns to banks that will.

Working with unions and local political and business leaders, the church coalition has sought pledges from 25,000 people who will put their deposits into a bank or banks that will invest in the Mon Valley. An estimated per family deposit of \$5,000 per year creates a sizeable total of \$125,000,000, which according to Snodgrass, allows a bank to borrow ten times that total from the Federal Reserve Bank and lend it out to make more money in interest.⁹

The programs cited above are exactly the kind of creative actions the churches should be fostering. And yet, it would be a mistake to assume that even these creative efforts can fill the gap created by the retreat of the federal government from the concerns of the poor. The welfare problem is vast. Poverty and oppression are not hard to find. For the government to insist on leaving provisions for the common welfare to laissez faire processes in the haphazard expression of voluntary impulses on the part of individuals, local congregations, local

⁹Lee Ranck, "The Frustration Is: What Do We Do About It?" Engage/Social Action 11 (June 1983) 22-23.

communities, and special interest groups while a vast, complexly interdependent, affluent society thrives around them seems to be an inherently unsympathetic attitude toward the poor, revealing a serious lack of understanding about the poverty problem. The scale of the work to be done in welfare is so large that it can only be done adequately upon the broad base of an extensive public welfare program. The churches should turn over to government sponsorship their ongoing programs which parallel or are part of previously established federal programs. Efforts by the churches to make public welfare more adequate and humane must continue at an increased pace. Church-related health and welfare programs which do not compete with other programs for funds and services, and which operate where there is a proven need, should continue their work, including cooperation with governmental agencies. But most of all, in the field of health and welfare, the church should pioneer and experiment—go beyond the present—be prophetic. And then when its programs prove successful, encourage that similar programs be adopted by governmental agencies with a broader base (of both recipients and funds) than the church. Churches should use their resources to be always ready for short-term, emergency relief to be utilized until no longer needed or until permanent governmental assistance can be arranged.

It is possible that in some communities, if the churches and their agencies do not take leadership in helping the poor, no one will do it. If that is actually the case, then the churches must be prepared to act, and act quickly, until a broader-based arrangement can be developed to place responsibility where it belongs--on the whole community. The churches must not be too quick to intervene or too

slow to relinquish their good deeds when other hands are ready to do the work.

The churches must be aware of the danger of conformity and uniformity at the expense of creativity, pioneering, experimentation, and the independent critical and prophetic role of the churches, which may well be their most important societal function. The churches have a concern for justice for the poor, for participation for the poor in decisions which affect their lives, and for a global society which can sustain a decent standard of living for all into the indefinite future. This concern is often at odds with the concerns of those who hold wealth and power in society. Thus, in working for this goal, the churches may have better means than acting as administrators for government programs. They may be called to ministries involving a tension, or even conflict, between themselves and government, rather than cooperation. The more the churches are able to differentiate and avoid being swept up in the fad and fashions of the moment, the more the values of pluralism and their own future good health are preserved. The more conformity and uniformity is expressed in private and sectarian welfare programs to the federal government programs, the less their independent and separate survival is justified. The churches should remain free of governmental involvement as much as possible, so that when the Spirit calls them to go to some new place or mode of service, they will be free to go—even to prodding the government into more adequate fulfillment of its duties.

It may be the churches' willing contribution and selfless sacrifice to launch new humanitarian enterprises for the good of society. If so, why do they so often try to cling to control of them? It may be that the churches' agencies want to serve everyone, employ anyone who meets professional standards regardless of creed, and refrain from religious practice or proselytization. Good! Then

why do they need to be related to churches? Anything they can properly do can be done as well by public or nonsectarian private agencies--in which Christians can exercise their vocation of compassion as well as they can in agencies with the name of the church over the door. And often that is the only link with the church--the denominational name. Is that what the churches want in welfare--a plethora of institutions indistinguishable from the other institutions of their class, with no distinctive quality but the name on the door?¹⁰

Probably the most basic understandings of the American tradition and of our Christian faith will join at the point of saying "yes" to the relinquishment of many of our vast footholds in the welfare fields which occasion much current distress in terms of church and state relations--subject, of course, to the ability and intention of government to meet real needs. Where need is concerned, there should be little question as to the full responsibility of government and its greater command of resources. Those who wish to maintain and expand religious welfare institutions by means of government subsidy, and as a substitute for direct governmental involvement in the welfare field, must clear themselves of the suspicion that they are motivated less by concern for people in need than by a desire to utilize the fulfillment of justice as the occasion for being commended for "good works." The Christian faith should surely involve a trust that it does not depend upon being able to match government institution for institution in such terms.¹¹

While there are many pitfalls surrounding church-state cooperation in welfare, nevertheless there are cases where such arrangements are appropriate. Where the church has identified a definite need in an area where the government can not or should not enter in a direct way, use of public funds for church-related welfare programs can be part of an appropriate response to need. The churches must take seriously the "conduit theory" posed by the courts as a legal test for the acceptability of such cooperation; the churches must carefully weigh decisions to participate in such cooperative ventures to see if they

¹⁰Dean M. Kelly, "Operational Consequences of Church-State Choices," Social Progress 57 (January-February 1967) 23-24.

¹¹Philip Wogaman, "The Changing Role of Government and the Myth of Separation," Journal of Church and State (May 1963) 75-76.

further their calling--the theological test--to create a just, participatory, and sustainable global society with the poor. Where the church can enter into such arrangements without compromising its calling, then cooperation between church and state in welfare may be appropriate.

The path outlined here is filled with difficulties. It has no easy answers, no blueprint for a perfect society. It is a path to be cleared one step at a time as the churches move forward together. It is not a highway with large signs. It involves struggle and searching to define the meaning of Christian faith in relationship to the poor in our midst. It involves ongoing ethical dialogue.¹²

This ethical dialogue is similar to that which occurs in the sensitive individual. Such a person is open to considering various options, is diligent in examining their personal values, discusses with others, and weighs their own conscience in the light of all the input they gather. A church should be a community engaged in a similar ongoing process. Christian ethicist James M. Gustafson has said that the internal life of a church should be "analogous to the life of a serious moral agent."¹³ Such a community is more likely to have a clear sense of its identity, mission, and goals, and less likely to merely reflect the values of the larger society. It establishes independence and integrity.

This ethical dialogue needs to occur along two fronts. The first is the dialogue that occurs within the Christian family--between

¹²William H. Jennings, Poor People and Churchgoers (New York: Seabury Press, 1972) 97.

¹³James M. Gustafson, The Church As Moral Decision-Maker (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970) 152.

individuals, congregations, and denominations. The churches are not depositories of miracle solutions to the problem of poverty or any other problem faced by the world today. It is a community of people on a journey, seeking and sharing as they hope for a preferred future. Christians must seek their own identity through dialogue.

The second front upon which there must be dialogue is at the place where the church and the world meet. As with the first front, the poor have much to contribute to this dialogue as well. This dialogue means that the church must abandon its belief that meaningful communication only happens when the church offers its wealth of knowledge to a waiting, needy world. Such one-way monologues must give way to a sense of the interrelationship inherent in true dialogue, where all parties make a mutual contribution and listen sincerely to each other.

A good case can be made that when there is solid ethical dialogue, constructive action will more likely follow.

One reason why churchgoers are so passive and inactive on social issues is that they are uncertain about the "why," unsure of how their faith should plug in. Churchgoers are often passive because the groundwork has not been laid through dialogue.¹⁴

One of the most significant failures of those church leaders who have been involved with the struggle of the poor is that they have not opened this dialogue with their church members. Their behavior has been likened to a military general who makes a valiant charge against the enemy and yet leaves the troops behind in their foxholes. It is a well-established principle of the social sciences that people are more likely to care, to mature, to respond, and to act, if they are part of the dialogue from the beginning. If the churches will take the initiative in opening

¹⁴Jennings, 101.

this dialogue, then perhaps a natural consequence will be its taking the initiative in action. If the dialogue opens the way for the churches to make a new alignment with the poor in their search for a just, participatory, and sustainable global society, then perhaps the first steps toward the alleviation of poverty will have been taken.

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